

WHAT CANADA IS DOING IN AFGHANISTAN!

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FIRE THIS TIME

We are realists... We dream the impossible - che



INDIAN IS NOT A FOUR-LETTER WORD

Indians can be equated with Europeans. The western hemisphere contains Bolivian Indians, Canadian Indians, etc. Europe contains French Europeans, German Europeans, etc. There are over 200 million Indians in the western hemisphere. It is sometimes said that 'Indian' is not valid because it is a European invention. However, most of the modern peoples and nations on earth were created by European colonialism. Page 4



ILLUSIONS TOLD AS FORECASTS

An editorial published on March 24th by The Economist, weekly speaker of the British financial oligarchy, tells stories and makes daring forecasts about Cuba, trying to show that the island, "has started on the road towards capitalism; and that will have big implications for the United States and the rest of Latin America." Page 6

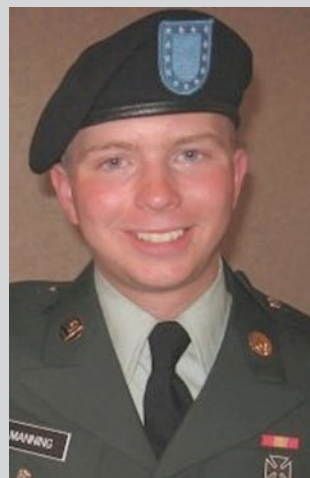
TEACHERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA FIGHTING FOR BETTER PUBLIC EDUCATION

Where do you stand on the issue of British Columbian teachers and the British Columbian government? As a teacher, I have to ask because it seems, if the media and letters to the editor are any indication, that the public might not side with the government, but is not totally ready to stand with teachers either. Page 14



FREE BRADLEY MANNING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED IN VANCOUVER, CANADA!

On Tuesday April 17, 2012 the Free Bradley Manning Campaign was launched in Vancouver, BC, Canada, joining groups and individuals in the U.S. and around the world who are protesting and organizing for the freedom of Bradley Manning. Over 60 people came together for the forum and campaign launching, titled "Bradley Manning, Soldier of Humanity". The launch of this campaign centers on the demands of "Free Bradley Manning" and asserts that blowing the whistle on war crimes is NOT a crime. Page 5



CANADA IN AFGHANISTAN

By Nita Palmer

On March 28, 2012, the Fourteenth and Final Report to Parliament on Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan was released. The report outlines the "accomplishments" Canada has made in Afghanistan between 2008 and 2011. One must ask the question: what "accomplishments" does the government speak of when hundreds of independent reports have indicated only a decline in the standard of living since Canadian and other foreign troops arrived in 2001?

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bombs?

Although the government claims that Canada has pulled out of the combat mission in Afghanistan, nearly 1000 troops still remain there under the guise of training the Afghan military and police. But if Canada has "pulled out" of the combat mission and troops are there only for training purposes, why are a full third of the troops which were there during the combat mission needed now? Regardless of the name put on the troops' role, one thing is clear: Canada is still very much an active part of the military mission in Afghanistan.

Cracks in the Foundation

It is not only in Afghanistan that this polarization between the people and the US, Canada and NATO occupation forces has begun to show itself. A recent New York Times/CBS poll showed that 69% of Americans believe the US should not be in Afghanistan. This number is now higher than opposition to the Iraq war at any point.

Not only is opposition to the occupation among poor and working people in the US on the rise, but opposition to the US and NATO war has appeared within the occupation forces themselves. In October 2009, Matthew Hoh, the Senior Civilian Representative for the US Government in Afghanistan's Zabul Province, resigned in protest over the occupation of Afghanistan. Opposition to the US government's policies in the country was also exposed by US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry's secret correspondence with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Increasing opposition to the war has forced the US, Canada, as well as NATO, to diffuse public anger and pressure by claiming they will leave in 2014. However, this claim is nothing more than an empty promise. After ten years of war and billions of dollars spent on the war in Afghanistan, they will not simply leave without establishing their interests in the country.

To the US and Canadian establishments, it does not matter if Afghanistan remains in chaos, if life remains miserable for Afghans, as long as it is secured as a base for their military and economic interests in the region.

All You Need to Do is Leave! Out Now!

Over ten years of war have come at a terrible cost, not only to Afghan people, but, to people in the US and Canada as well. Nearly 3,000 NATO soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan; 1,942 of them American and 158 Canadian. In this country we are told there is no money in the pot for essential services such as education and health care, and we are facing new austerity measures such as the raising of the retirement age to 67. However, funds for the war in Afghanistan are flowing freely. The government of Canada has spent more than 22 billion taxpayer dollars on the war to date and is spending more every day.

This war has brought no benefit to people in Canada, and has brought nothing but destruction and suffering to Afghanistan. The most important thing Canada could do to help Afghan people is to leave immediately. No, this would not bring immediate peace, democracy or human rights to Afghanistan - the road ahead for Afghans would be long and difficult. But foreign forces have shown unequivocally that they are not improving life in Afghanistan in any way. Above all, Afghan people have the right to self-determination - to build a country by and for Afghans, not foreign interests. It is our duty as human beings to demand an end to this brutal, illegal and unjust war. It's time to build a strong, effective and united antiwar movement in Canada and beyond. Building a movement which could end the war may seem an enormous task, but it was a movement of ordinary people in the US, and, of course the great resistance of Vietnamese people, that ended the infamous US war in Vietnam. We have no other option: if this war is to be defeated, it will be by you, me, and our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan.



safe haven for terrorists, a country that is better governed, a country in control of its own destiny." Yet with one look at the Afghan situation, it can be seen that, without a doubt, just the opposite has happened since Canada and other foreign forces have been in the country. Afghanistan is not more peaceful — it is a country being ravaged by war as we speak. It is not a country on the path to eliminating terrorism — the war has only encouraged it. It is not a country which is better governed — President Hamid Karzai is laughingly referred to by Afghans, who largely see their new "democracy" as a farce, as the "Mayor of Kabul". And it certainly is not a country in control of its own destiny — how can it be when tens of thousands of foreign troops have taken over the country?

To those who would argue that Afghanistan is a "work in progress" and that peace and democracy do not come overnight, one must ask: what peace and democracy have ever been brought to a country at gunpoint? What human rights and prosperity have ever been brought by radioactive



I think -and I do not intend to offend anyone- that this is how the Prime Minister of Canada is called. I deduced it from a statement published on "Holy Wednesday" by a spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry of that country. The United Nations Organization membership is made up by almost 200 States -allegedly independent States. They continuously change or are forced into change. Many of their representatives are honorable persons, friends of Cuba; but it is impossible to remember the specifics about each and every one of them.

During the second half of the twentieth century, I had the privilege of living through years of intensive erudition and I realized that Canadians, located in the northernmost region of this hemisphere, were always respectful towards our country. They invested in areas of their interest and traded with Cuba, but they did not interfere in the internal affairs of our State.

The revolutionary process that began on January 1st, 1959, did not introduce any measure that affected their interests, which were taken into account by the Revolution in maintaining normal and constructive relations with the authorities of that country where a significant effort was being made in the interest of its own development. Thus, they were not accomplices of the economic blockade, the war and the mercenary invasion that the United States launched against Cuba.

In May of 1948, the year that witnessed the foundation of the OAS, an institution with a shameful history which did away with what little was left from the dreams of the Liberators of the Americas, Canada did not belong to it. It kept that same status for more than 40 years, until 1990. Some of its leaders visited us. One of them was Pierre Elliott Trudeau, a brilliant and courageous politician who died prematurely. We attended his burial on behalf of Cuba.

The OAS is supposed to be a regional organization made up by the sovereign States of this hemisphere. Such an assertion, like many others which are made everyday, involves a great number of lies. The least we can do is to be aware of them, if we are to preserve the spirit of struggle and our confidence on a more decent world.

The OAS is supposed to be a pan-American organization. Any country in Europe, Africa, Asia or Oceania could not belong to the OAS just because it has a colony, as it is the case of France in Guadeloupe; or the Netherlands in Curaçao. But the British colonialism could not define the status of Canada and explain whether it was a colony, a republic or a kingdom.

The Head of State of Canada is Queen Elizabeth II, although she vests her powers upon a Governor-General appointed by her. Therefore, we could ask whether the United Kingdom is also part of the OAS.

Likewise, the Honorable Foreign Minister of

Canada does not dare to say whether or not he supports Argentina in the thorny issue of the Malvinas Islands. He has only expressed beatific wishes for peace to prevail between the two countries. But Great Britain has there its biggest military base outside its territory in violation of Argentina's sovereignty. It did not apologize for having sunk the 'General Belgrano' cruiser which was sailing outside the jurisdictional waters that they themselves established which led to the futile sacrifice of hundreds of youths who were doing their military service. We should ask Obama and Harper what stand they will take in the face of the fairest claim by Argentina to be given back the sovereignty over the islands so that it is no longer deprived of the energy and fishing resources it so much needs to

According to the article, the mining laws in our countries [...] do not include any obligation or methodology to control environmental or social impacts; the tax revenues that mining companies pay to the countries of the region are, as an average, no more than 1.5 per cent of the revenues received.

The article adds that the social struggle against mining, particularly metal mining, has been growing as long as entire generations are becoming aware of the environmental and social impacts it causes.

It states that Guatemala has put up an admirable resistance against mining projects, thanks to the indigenous populations' awareness of the value of their territories and their natural resources, which

they consider a priceless ancestral heritage. However, in the last 10 years, the consequences

of that struggle have been

felt in the assassination of 120 human rights' activists and advocates.

This article also describes the current situation in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, with figures that make us meditate very deeply about the seriousness and harshness of the ruthless pillaging that is being carried out against the natural resources of our countries, thus mortgaging the future of Latin Americans.

The presence of Dilma Rousseff, who made a stopover in Washington while traveling back to her country, will serve to persuade Obama that although there are some who take great delight in making slushy

speeches, Latin America is far from being a choir of countries begging for alms.

The guayabera shirts to be worn by Obama in Cartagena has become one of the main issues covered by the news agencies: "Edgar Gomez [...] has designed one for the U.S. President, Barack Obama, who will be wearing it during the Summit of the Americas," said the daughter of the designer, who added: "It is a white, sober guayabera, with a handiwork that is more striking than usual..."

Immediately after that, the news agency added that the Caribbean shirt was first made by the banks of the Yayabo River in Cuba; that is why they were originally called yayaberas.

The curious thing about this, dear readers, is that Cuba has been forbidden to attend that meeting, but not the guayaberas. Who could hold back from laughing? We must hurry up and tell Harper.



Fidel Castro Ruz

April 8, 2012

Reflection by Fidel Castro Stephen Harper's Illusions



develop the country.

I was really amazed after I made a much deeper analysis of the activities carried out by Canadian transnationals in Latin America. I knew about the damage caused by the Yankees to the people of Canada. They forced the country to look for oil by extracting it from huge extensions of sand that are impregnated with that fluid, thus causing an irreparable damage to the environment of that beautiful and extensive country.

The incredible damage was the one caused to millions of persons by the Canadian companies specialized in the mining of gold, precious metals and radioactive materials.

An article published by the website Alainet a week ago, signed by an Engineer on Environmental Quality, which provides further details about an issue that has been identified innumerable times as one of the main scourges that affect millions of persons, stated that mining companies, 60 per cent of which are financed with Canadian capital, worked following the logic of maximum yield at a low cost and in a short time; and that these conditions turn out to be all the more advantageous if in the places where they are stationed, tax revenues are minimal and there are very few environmental and social commitments...

By Ray Bobb

Indians can be equated with Europeans. The western hemisphere contains Bolivian Indians, Canadian Indians, etc. Europe contains French Europeans, German Europeans, etc. There are over 200 million Indians in the western hemisphere. It is sometimes said that 'Indian' is not valid because it is a European invention. However, most of the modern peoples and nations on earth were created by European colonialism.

In the great age of exploration and discovery, so-called, the peoples of tribal nations were no match for capitalist empires that were covering the world. Imperialism divided the world amongst European great powers and, in doing so, unified the peoples of thousands of separately existing tribal nations, arbitrarily, into areas of exclusive profit making, i.e., colonies or oppressed nations. Having created a world of exploitation of nation by nation, the imperialists then faced the reality that modern nations—former de jure colonies—could expel them from or defeat them in the present-day third world. Examples of this capacity are, in the last century, China led by Mao Tse-Tung and Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh. Intrinsic to the turning of the tide in world history are modern people and nations. Their strength within and between nations, is not only greater than that of their former status but also greater than that of the imperialists. Meanwhile, the imperialists still do employ tribalism and division to maintain hegemony.

At contact, natives outnumbered settlers in the remaining colonies of British North America. England made treaties of alliance with tribal nations in order to (1) defeat other tribal nations, (2) defeat the French (1760) and American (1812) competitors, and, (3) facilitate settlement. This treaty process was formalized in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This was a period in the world wherein all non-European peoples were being incorporated, by genocidal wars, into empires of European capital. The population of the non-European world was severely reduced. Some island peoples—in Tasmania, Newfoundland, and islands in the Caribbean—were completely wiped out. In the western hemisphere, the establishment of European sovereignty is estimated to have cost over 70 million native lives.

1867, Confederation, marked the transformation of the remaining British colonies in North America into, another, imperialist settler-state—the Dominion of Canada. Also created, from the survivors of the tribal nations destroyed by the British, was a modern people—Canadian Indians—and a native internal colony administered by the Department of Indian Affairs under the authority of the Indian Act.

INDIAN IS NOT A FOUR LETTER WORD



Indigenous Rights Rally at G20/G8 Summits, Toronto June 24, 2010

In 1969, with the (proposed) White Paper Policy on Indians (WP), the federal government signaled that its unrelenting attack on Indian people would escalate from an attack on Indian culture, implemented in the forced removal of all Indian children to residential schools, to a wholesale attack on Indians as a people. The WP proposed to,

unilaterally, abolish the Indian Act, dismantle the Department of Indian Affairs, remove the protection of land reserved for Indians and nullify any legal distinctions between Indians and Canadian people. That is, the problem of internal colonialism would be resolved by extinguishment, i.e., by legislating Indians out of existence. The WP was met by opposition from Indians and in 1971 it was retracted. In 1973, the objectives of the WP were reinstated in the Comprehensive Land Claims Settlement Policy (CLC) as a treaty process in which native communities, one at a time or in groups, would be required to remove them-

selves from the jurisdiction of the Indian Act and incorporate into a Canadian jurisdiction, i.e., a Canadian municipality or territory. To effect such a piece-meal treaty process the federal government ostensibly recognized Indian bands as nations, i.e., First Nations.

To date, the federal government's treaty process has taken place in the entire Canadian North, e.g., Nunavut, and many communities of the Canadian South, e.g., the Nishga'a and Tsawwassen, providing to the financial and corporate elite certainty of investment and freedom of access to native resources. (The Inuit people of the Canadian North are a distinct part of the native internal colony. Their relationship to Canada and their experience with residential schools and treaties is, categorically, the same as that of the Indian people.)

The requirements of the CLC treaty process violate international laws protecting all peoples' rights to their nationality and self-determination, i.e., Article 15 of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Article 1 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The federal government's treaty process is coercive in that resources are withheld from underprivileged communities in order to force them into the treaty process. The federal government's treaty process is fraudulent in that, in negotiations involving the colonial relationship between two opposed national entities, the federal government funds the native representatives. The federal government's treaty process is an act of war against the native people in that it forces members of native communities to disenfranchise and secede from the native internal colony. Native people cannot expel or defeat Canadian imperialism. However, by virtue of being completely expropriated, native people are also members of the Canadian working class. Being active in this class will bring about a unity and understanding whereby, one day, natives can negotiate with the Canadian working class for self-determination up to and including sovereignty. Until then, survival dictates that there can be no negotiations with the Canadian imperialist settler-state; only resistance.

About This Article

Fundamental to the discussion of Indigenous rights in Canada is a critical look at the historic roots and causes of this conflict. Analyzing the development of colonialism and capitalism in the western hemisphere is necessary in order to understand how Indigenous people, rich in culture, language and society, were made alien on their own land and governed by a settler state. Every unacceptable statistic that reflects the realities of Indigenous people in this country today can be traced back to those roots.

Ray Bobb is a member of the Seabird Island Indian Band. He is a writer and long-time fighter for Native rights. His essay, 'Indian is Not a Four-Letter Word,' is an important contribution to the thoughts and actions pushing towards self-determination for Indigenous nations by focusing on the theoretical aspect of our history and a way to move forward.

BRADLEY MANNING SOLDIER OF HUMANITY



Bradley Manning is the 24 year old U.S. soldier accused of leaking over 260,000 classified United States diplomatic cables, as well as videos and documents which have become known as the Afghan War Diary and the Iraq War Logs. Published on the whistleblower site Wikileaks, they further exposed US war crimes around the world including mass killings, torture, corruption, and the government's web of lies and attempted cover-up of United States atrocities. For telling the truth and acting upon his conscience, Bradley faces 22 charges, including "Aiding the enemy by indirect means," which could result in the death penalty or life in prison. He was also held in solitary confinement for the first 10 months of his incarceration. During this time he was denied meaningful exercise, social interaction, sunlight, and has occasionally been kept completely naked. These conditions were unique to Bradley and are illegal even under US military law as they amount to extreme pre-trial punishment. Public outcry for this "soldier of humanity" has been widespread all around the world. In one week in April



Launching Free Bradley Manning Campaign in Vancouver

2011, over a half million people signed a petition calling on President Obama to end the isolation and torture of Bradley Manning, as those condition serve as "a chilling deterrent to other potential whistleblowers committed to public integrity."

Bradley's treatment has also sparked a probe by the United Nations chief torture investigator Juan Mendez, who says he has been, "frustrated by the prevarication of the US government with regard to my attempts to visit Mr. Manning." Protests continue across the world, and Bradley has also been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Text modified from Bradley Manning Support Network Website:
www.bradleymanning.org

FREE BRADLEY MANNING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED BY MOBILIZATION AGAINST WAR & OCCUPATION (MAWO) IN VANCOUVER, BC CANADA!

By Janine Solanki

On Tuesday April 17, 2012 the Free Bradley Manning Campaign was launched in Vancouver, BC, Canada, joining groups and individuals in the U.S. and around the world who are protesting and organizing for the freedom of Bradley Manning. Over 60 people came together for the forum and campaign launching, titled "Bradley Manning, Soldier of Humanity"

The launch of this campaign centers on the demands of "Free Bradley Manning" and asserts that blowing the whistle on war crimes is NOT a crime. Bradley Manning, a 24-year-old U.S. Army intelligence analyst, has been in prison in the U.S. for two years without trial, and has faced over 10 months of solitary confinement, in conditions that are illegal even under U.S. military law. Bradley Manning is accused of leaking the "collateral murder" video footage showing the killing of civilians, including two Reuters journalists, by a U.S. Apache helicopter crew in Iraq. He is also charged with sharing documents known as the Afghan War Diary, the Iraq War Logs, and U.S. diplomatic cables with WikiLeaks. For the so-called "crime" of blowing the whistle on war crimes, Bradley Manning faces 22 charges, including "Aiding the enemy by indirect means," for which a conviction could result in the death penalty or life in prison.

The forum was opened by Janine Solanki, MC of the event and co-chair of Mobilization Against War & Occupation (MAWO), who welcomed participants and especially welcomed visiting U.S. Veterans for Peace member and organizer Cliff Wells. The forum began with a series of news and video clips that illustrated the case of Bradley Manning and the fight for his freedom, including the "collateral murder" footage that Bradley Manning is accused of leaking.

The first featured speaker was another U.S. guest, Jeff Paterson, who spoke via video conference from Oakland, California. Jeff is the project director of Courage to Resist, an organization which provides support for war resisters and whistleblowers, Jeff is also on the steering committee of the Bradley Manning Support Network (www.bradleymanning.org). Jeff detailed Bradley Manning's life and how he came to the decision that he must release the exposing documents, as well as explained how Bradley Manning is subjected to extremely harsh and terrible conditions in prison. Jeff also gave examples of the actions supporters and organizations around the world have taken to support him. Beyond the case of Bradley Manning, Jeff also spoke of the brutality of the war in Iraq that prompted Bradley Manning's actions.

Following Jeff, Cliff Wells spoke on his experience as a veteran and compared the case of Bradley Manning with the case of many other whistleblowers throughout the last few decades. Cliff also spoke of the increasing attacks on democratic rights that Bradley Manning is a huge example of. After the guest speakers, Janine Solanki spoke of the political and economical crisis of the world that we live in, and how important it is that in a world so dominated by the imperialist "fighting terrorism" campaign and after a decade of a new era of war and occupation, someone like Bradley Manning had the courage to challenge imperialist aggression and destruction. Janine also emphasized the importance of taking on the campaign to free Bradley Manning not only in the U.S., but also in Canada, as the attack on Bradley Manning is an attack on all peace loving people and the antiwar



movement which must be defended.

Before opening the floor to discussion, MAWO's newly created petition to Free Bradley Manning was passed around the room and collected its first signatures, with the resolve to collect many thousands more.

The discussion that followed was energized with the spirit of struggle to take this campaign forward. Many people not only asked questions, but put forward ideas for building the campaign to free Bradley Manning in Vancouver and BC. The forum came to a close with encouraging and determined words from the speakers, and the promise for more events and actions to come as the Free Bradley Manning Campaign grows here in Vancouver and in Canada.



By Manuel Yepe*

An editorial published on March 24th by The Economist, weekly speaker of the British financial oligarchy, tells stories and makes daring forecasts about Cuba, trying to show that the island “has started on the road towards capitalism; and that will have big implications for the United States and the rest of Latin America.”

It regrets the fact that “even two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Cuba remains one of the handful of countries around the world where communism lives on.”

Using trite arguments and lies from the aged and manipulated anti-Cuban media campaign paid for and suffered by, US citizens, this editorial attempts to minimize the updating of the economic and social model Cuba has chosen to promote its economic progress and the development of ethical and political values corresponding to the present stage of socialism in Cuba.

With complete disregard for the differ-

leader Lula Da Silva and urban guerrilla Dilma Rousseff) The Economist considers their enthusiastic support to the works of extension and modernization of the deepwater port in Mariel as their way to give Cuba a “useful capitalist tool”.

“Unfortunately –says The Economist– the US policy towards Cuba resembles a 50-year tantrum, rather than a coherent plan for encouraging a transition to democracy.”

It is known that in imperialist language “transition to democracy” means “return to obedience”. Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya are suffering this.

The Economist criticizes the weakness of



Cuban youth march in the May Day Rally in Havana May 1, 2011

“After 50 years in which it has been an exception, the island’s destiny increasingly resembles that of its region. It is high time that those on both sides of the Florida Strait recognize that. Half a century of failure is evidence enough to support a change of policy,” affirms the magazine of the big British capitalists.

Cuba has demonstrated that submission to Washington is not an inevitable predes-

ILLUSIONS SOLD AS FORECASTS

ent public policies of the Revolution and their implementation since 1959, it misunderstands the modification of methods and styles of work being applied in Cuba to guarantee the irreversibility of socialism and the social advantages achieved. It confuses the present projection of the struggle of Cubans with what would be a shameful and unacceptable return to capitalism.

The editorial tells “outsiders to take interest in how they can best speed change in Cuba”. Whoever follows this recommendation from The Economist, will coincide with the purposes of the reforms taking place in the island, but the direction of the changes taking place is completely opposite to that of world capitalism.

It admits that the groups of dissidents that the US sponsors in Cuba are small and isolated, and that the rest of Latin America supports Cuba; but on this last issue it implies this is not done willingly, but only because they prefer to accept the reforms rather than confront them.

Disrespectfully, or ignoring the revolution-ary militancy of Brazilian presidents (union

the US under the pressure of the anti-Cuba lobby that opposes all negotiation with the island and considers that if in Cuba there are no changes that satisfy the West, there will be a civil war and a bloodbath.

Ignoring the patriotic motivations of Cubans who support the Revolution, the editorial speculates that in the midst of chaos “Cuba’s formidable security and intelligence agencies will become hired guns at the service of drug trafficking and organized crime” when South Florida Cuban Americans are attracted to the conflict.

But the point when the article in The Economist shows its worst journalistic technical and professional flaws is in its conclusions when it defines Cuba as a “declining corner of a rising, and largely democratic, Latin America.”

Disregarding that the present ascent of Latin America and the democratic advances in the region are, to a great extent, the fruit of the successful resistance of Cubans to the US siege in place for more than half a century, the Economist editorial calls on Washington to change its policy:

tionation for the nations in the hemisphere and that the independence of submitted peoples in the world is viable and sustainable through resistance, sacrifice, courage and solidarity.

March 2012.

**Manuel E. Yepe, is a lawyer, economist and journalist. He is a professor at the Higher Institute of International Relations in Havana. He was Cuba’s ambassador to Romania, general director of the Prensa Latina agency; vice president of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television; founder and national director of the Technological Information System (TIPS) of the United Nations Program for Development in Cuba, and secretary of the Cuban Movement for the Peace and Sovereignty of the Peoples.*

*A CubaNews translation.

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It Takes a Province of Millions to Hold Campbell Back
The role of the Anti-Social Movement after a year and a half

By Thomas Davies

The Anti-Social Movement (ASM) has been a force to be reckoned with in the past year and a half. It has been a force that has been able to bring together a diverse group of people, from students to workers, from the left to the right, and from the urban to the rural. It has been a force that has been able to bring together a diverse group of people, from students to workers, from the left to the right, and from the urban to the rural. It has been a force that has been able to bring together a diverse group of people, from students to workers, from the left to the right, and from the urban to the rural.

EDITORIAL

THIS ISSUE OF FIRE THIS TIME

Fire This Time Newspaper is out in your hands again. We are back and determined to get the paper out regularly. We are hoping to be able to publish the newspaper every three weeks, or 16 issues in one year. However, we will publish once a month in August and in September due to holidays and also conferences we are organizing.

Fire This Time, is a revolutionary newspaper. Our newspaper reflects the battle of ideas that is shaping the political, economic and social fabrics of our society on the local and international stage. Fire This Time is a platform and standpoint of working and oppressed people. We intend to present an alternative that is intellectually honest and presents facts and analysis for those who are interested to know the truth and want to bring about a better world.

We have taken a side in the battle between the dark forces and the forces of humanity. We are objective in the sense that we do not deny reality, but we are against the order of the current reality. We are for fundamental economical and social change. Hence, Fire This Time reflects the struggle and revolutionary independent working class policies, to advocate for socialist change. Humanity, as a consequence of the deep and irresolvable crisis of capitalism and imperialism, is on the verge of total collapse. The potential, capacity and

capability of human beings is immense, but unfortunately it is captivated by the destructive forces of capital and its war machine. No conscious men and women in this world can be indifferent to this injustice.

Fire This Time newspaper was born out of necessity, not out of an eccentric desire, to present our vision. As a matter of fact after many considerations and looking more carefully into what we wanted to achieve in the short and long run as revolutionaries and looking into the potential and actual capacity of the working class movement and its political organizations, as a whole, we decided to go ahead with this project. Not because we have better ideas for building a revolutionary movement, but because we did not see an alternative to join or to follow as our revolutionary vanguard. Furthermore, we made a decision to set an example in journalism, action and leadership, basically setting example rather than just criticizing others based on factionalism and sectarianism.

How about finances? We are independent. The truth is we have always relied on the generous contributions of our supporters and readers. We have never received a single penny from any mainstream, progressive, or other institution. This is an ambitious project, with grassroots support and thousands of hours of volunteer work. We do not wish for anybody to impose their agendas on us in exchange for their money.

If you believe we are doing a good job; if you think it is worth it to support this small revolutionary newspaper, then we would like to appeal for your financial help. We assure you that you are our reason for existence and we depend solely on you. Thank you. Here we would like to quote from one of the many encouragements we have received from our readers in the past. A kind reader once said, "This is the only paper that has the guts to say the truth with no other agenda".





A DECADE OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

By Nita Palmer

It has now been over ten years since the war in Afghanistan began, and the past few months have without a doubt shown that all is not going well in that country.

Some Bad Apples Vs. Policy of Systematic Contempt

January 2012 opened with a scandal regarding the torture and abuse of Afghan detainees at the US-run Bagram prison. Former prisoners at Bagram came forward saying they had been subjected to physical abuse and forced nudity and were left for extended periods in freezing cells or cells without light. Only 300 of the 3,000 detainees being held at Bagram have legal cases against them — all others are being held without trial. Adding to the injustice is the fact that prisoners at Bagram do not have the right to legal representation or the right to see evidence being used against them. Daphne Eviatar, a lawyer for Human Rights First who investigated the situation at Bagram, described it as being “worse than Guantanamo, because there are fewer rights.”

The US Forces’ lack of respect for Afghan rights and dignity reared its ugly head again in March, when US soldiers at Bagram Air Base burned

dozens of copies of the Koran. US officials quickly scrambled to explain it was a “mistake”, but the Afghan people were not convinced, and protests against foreign forces broke out across the country. Regardless of the justifications made by the US, Afghans saw this as ultimate proof of the disrespect foreign forces have for Afghan culture and religion.

Then just a few weeks after the Koran burnings came an incident which shocked and disgusted people across the world. US Staff Sergeant Robert Bales left his base in Kandahar in the middle of the night and systematically murdered 17 Afghans — three of them women and nine of them children.

In addition to these ugly occurrences, two separate incidents this year involving US soldiers desecrating the bodies of Afghan fighters have shown the grotesque face of the US/NATO occupation. In January, a video was released of US soldiers urinating on the bodies of alleged Taliban militants. Then in April, another humiliation of the Afghan people came when the Los Angeles Times released horrifying photos of US soldiers posing with bodies and body parts of Afghan militants.

The opening months of 2012 have, above all, exposed the absolute disrespect that foreign forces have for Afghan culture, religion and, most of all, for Afghan people themselves.

All efforts by the US government, NATO and worldwide mainstream media that try to explain that all this happened because some “bad apples” could not stop the revelation of the policy of contempt exercised by occupation forces in Afghanistan since the beginning of war and



occupation in that country.

Desperate Damage Control

Despite talk by officials in NATO and the US military about the need for cultural sensitivity, the fact is that troops are trained to see Afghans as sub-human. US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and others have tried to dismiss these attacks on the dignity of Afghan people as the work of a few “crazies” or “bad apples”, but the truth is this sort of behaviour by troops is merely a reflection of the view of the US and NATO military establishment towards Afghanistan as a whole. After all, this is essentially what the occupation forces are trained for: to kill people who they are taught to believe are savages and as former Canadian Chief of Defense Staff General Rick Hillier once called them, “detestable murderers and scumbags”.

The US military is, on one hand, condemning the actions of Sergeant Bales while, on the other, continuing the systematic murder of thousands more Afghans — including many women and children. How can an institution such as the US military, which has spent the last ten years



bombing weddings, terrorizing and killing men, women and children and locking up innocent people expect its soldiers to uphold a higher moral standard?

Resistance and Fight for Dignity

However, Afghans have not let these attacks on their country, culture, religion and dignity go unanswered. Following the burnings of the Koran at Bagram, massive protests erupted across the country. These protests were not just concentrated in the south or in Kandahar, where resistance to the occupation has long been the strongest, but extended into the northern provinces as well. These were not only protests against the burnings of the Koran, either — they were protests against the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan.

Just days after the Koran burnings, during a protest outside a US base in Nangarhar province, a man wearing an Afghan National Security Forces uniform killed two US soldiers. Soon after this, two American officers working in the Afghan Interior Ministry were shot at their desks by a driver working for police intelligence. Then on March 26, three NATO soldiers were shot by Afghan security forces in two separate incidents. On April 16, seven different attacks were directed at buildings across Kabul, including the German embassy, NATO bases and the Afghan parliament.

A recent Associated Press tally found that so far this year 16 NATO personnel have been shot and killed by Afghan soldiers, police or resistance fighters wearing their uniforms. That number equals 18 percent of the foreign troops killed this year in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Fox News states that “Of the approximately 80 NATO service members killed since 2007 by Afghan security forces, more than 75 percent were in the past two years.” The increase in these bold attacks is an undeniable sign of the increasing strength of Afghan forces fighting against foreign occupation.

The first four months of 2012 have undoubtedly shown an increasing polarization in this war, with Afghan people on one side and foreign forces on the other. As attacks on Afghan culture, dignity and way of life by foreign forces

continue, the Afghan resistance will only grow stronger.

The Terrible Cost of a Decade of War

These recent incidents should not come as a surprise. They are simply the inevitable consequence of nearly 11 years of brutal war and occupation which has shattered the lives of Afghan people. Despite claims by the US and NATO that Afghanistan has improved in the areas of democracy, human and women's rights, the facts on the ground tell much a different story.

According to a 2009 report by Water Aid, only 13 percent of the Afghan population had access to improved water sources such as wells or running water. Ninety-two percent of the country has no access to improved sanitation facilities. The lack of these basic necessities causes thousands of unnecessary and often deadly cases of cholera, typhoid and other infectious diseases. According to the British organization, Action Aid, a well for 120 people in Afghanistan costs 790 pounds or about \$1,200 USD to build. The US Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments estimates that the cost of keeping one soldier in Afghanistan for one year is about \$1.4 million. This means that for the cost of one soldier in Afghanistan, 1167 wells could be built to provide clean water for 140,000 people. For the cost of keeping just 175 soldiers in Afghanistan, wells could be built to provide clean drinking water for the entire country. Surely any force that was truly interested in improving the lives of Afghan people would build such vital structures rather than send soldiers!

The much-touted goal of promoting women's rights in Afghanistan is a farce as well. According to a 2011 report by the Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan, violence against women is on the rise across the



January 21, 2011. US airstrikes destroy Afghan village of Tarok Kolache, Kandahar

country. There are now more Afghan women in jail — often for being the victims of rape or violence — than the total number of prisoners in the country before 2001. A recent Thomson Reuters survey ranked Afghanistan the most dangerous country in the world for women, citing high maternal mortality rates, lack of access to health care and a “near total lack of economic rights” as reasons for the situation.

“In the south and east, life for women is mostly unchanged since the Taliban times: they remain cloistered indoors, in burqas, away from schools, without health care, without independence, and without protection from physical and sexual violence. And in some ways, life is even worse than during the Taliban: these women now live in an active war zone, caught in a crossfire between belligerents,” says Anand Gopal, a prominent writer on Afghanistan, in an article for the Huffington Post.

Claim Vs. Reality

In addition to their ongoing struggle for the most basic rights, women are now subjected to house raids, bombings and shootings by foreign forces. Those whose husbands have been killed in the war are increasingly forced into prostitution as the only means of survival available to them, while others are forced to send their young children to work.

The US, Canada and NATO may claim they are working for women's rights in Afghanistan, but the very government they have installed there has been taking away those rights at every turn. A number of fundamentally anti-woman laws have been passed under the current government. There have been numerous reports of women being raped by the NATO trained Afghan military and police, and even by Afghan Members of Parliament. On top of this, the



continued on page 10

Afghan government is currently in talks of a power-sharing agreement with the Taliban — the very force which the US and NATO have decried for their violations of women's rights!

While the US and NATO tout their humanitarian mission of bringing security, democracy and human rights to Afghanistan, they are in fact destroying the lives of Afghan people in the most disgusting and inhumane way possible. Since the initial bombing of the country in October 2001, the US military has been using depleted uranium munitions against the Afghan people. While the US military continually denies this, a number of studies have shown undeniable proof that these weapons are being used. Afghans civilians began reporting strange cases of people with no apparent injuries dying soon after bombings. Afghan medical facilities began recording a sudden increase in cases of unexplained respiratory and musculoskeletal disorders in areas which had been recently bombed. Following these reports, the Uranium Medical Research Centre went to Afghanistan to conduct a study. Results of the study showed that uranium isotope levels in the urine of Afghans were 300-2000 percent higher than normal safe levels. Since 2001, there has been a drastic rise in the number of cases of cancer, leukemia, and miscarriages, particularly in the southeastern Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. Children are affected the most by this horror. Many are born with severe birth defects, while others develop deadly cancers early in life. Since this war began, Afghans have lost even the basic right to breathe, drink and eat without endangering their lives or the lives of their children. Furthermore, uranium-238, the radioactive material used in these munitions, has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. The US and their allies are not just killing Afghan people today — this war is killing and deforming literally all future generations of Afghans.

Failed Conquerors

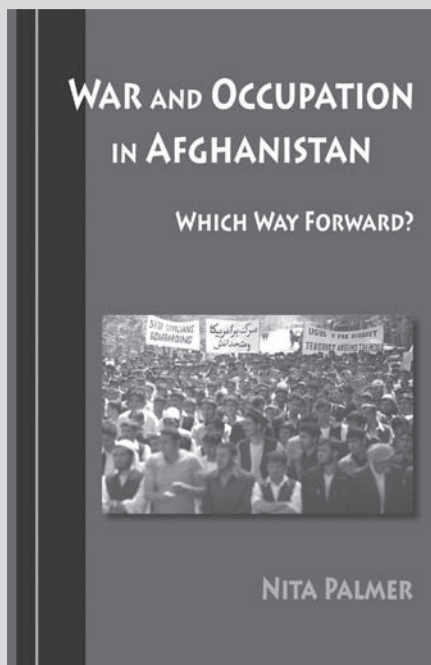
Since the facts of life in Afghanistan make it abundantly clear that the true interest of foreign forces in the country is not to help Afghan people, we must ask ourselves what their true intentions there are. Afghanistan has long been known as the "rooftop of the world" because of its central location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Throughout history, many armies have tried to conquer Afghanistan in order to control this strategic area. In today's world of global economic crisis and fierce competition, Afghanistan has once again come to be the unlucky victim of imperialist powers seeking new trade markets and more resources. However, Afghanistan has just as often been the downfall of these imperialist powers. Since the beginning of their history, Afghans have never allowed a foreign force to take over their country. The US and NATO countries will soon be added to the list of failed conquerors.

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WAR AND OCCUPATION IN AFGHANISTAN WHICH WAY FORWARD?



"The problem of Afghanistan boils down to just two words: foreign occupation. The Canada/US/NATO occupation forces claim that corruption, poverty, drug production, the presence of the Taliban and other social or political crises are the fundamental problems of Afghanistan which they must fix. The irony of this claim is that the same occupation forces have proven themselves completely incapable of fixing these problems or of bettering the lives of Afghan people one bit after eight years of occupation. Under the watchful eye of the occupation forces, corruption has become rampant in Afghanistan, from the local level all the way up to the highest levels of government. Afghanistan has gone from producing less than 10% of the world's opium in 2001 to producing a staggering 93% of the world's opium in 2008, according to the UN World Health Organization."

BY NITA PALMER

Nita Palmer is an author and researcher on the war in Afghanistan. She is a member of the editorial board of Vancouver, Canada-based social justice newspaper Fire This Time.

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ILUSIONES CONTADOS

como pronósticos

*Por Manuel Yepe**

Un artículo editorial publicado el 24 de marzo por el semanario *The Economist*, vocero de la oligarquía financiera británica, cuenta historias y hace pronósticos aventurados sobre Cuba que pretenden hacer ver que la Isla “ha iniciado un cambio trascendental en ruta hacia el capitalismo que tendrá grandes implicaciones para Estados Unidos y el resto de América Latina”.

Lamenta de que “incluso dos décadas después de la caída del muro de Berlín, Cuba sigue siendo uno de los pocos países del mundo donde vive el comunismo”.

Echando garra a elementos de las gastadas manipulaciones y mentiras de la campaña mediática anticubana que hace medio siglo paga y sufre la ciudadanía de Estados Unidos, el editorial pretende desvirtuar la actualización del modelo económico y social que ha emprendido Cuba en aras de la continuidad del avance económico y el desarrollo de los valores éticos y políticos que corresponden a la actual etapa del socialismo en Cuba.

Con total ignorancia de las diversas políticas públicas de la revolución y de sus puestas en práctica desde 1959, confunde la modificación de los métodos y estilos de trabajo que lleva a cabo Cuba para garantizar la irreversibilidad del socialismo y de las ventajas sociales alcanzadas. Trueca la proyección actual de la lucha de los cubanos con lo que sería un bochornoso e inaceptable regreso al capitalismo.

El editorial sugiere “a los forasteros que viajen

a Cuba que se interesen por conocer de qué manera ellos pueden contribuir a la aceleración de los cambios”. Quienes sigan esa recomendación de *The Economist* coincidirían con los propósitos de las reformas que en la Isla se llevan a cabo, solo que la dirección de los cambios que se están produciendo difiere diametralmente de aquella a que aspira el capitalismo mundial.

Reconoce que los grupos de disidentes que Estados Unidos patrocina en Cuba son pequeños y aislados, y que el resto de Latinoamérica apoya a Cuba; solo que, respecto a esto último, argumenta que no lo hacen de buena gana sino porque prefieren aceptar las reformas antes que enfrentarse a ellas.

Irrespetuosamente, o ignorando la militancia revolucionaria de los presidentes brasileños (el dirigente obrero Lula DaSilva y la guerrillera urbana Dilma Rousseff), *The Economist* atribuye el apoyo entusiasta de éstos a la obras de ampliación y modernización del Puerto del Mariel, al interés por dotar a Cuba de “una herramienta capitalista útil”.

“Desgraciadamente –dice *The Economist*– la política de los Estados Unidos hacia Cuba ha sido una rabieta frenética de cincuenta años en vez de un coherente plan para estimular una transición a la democracia”.

Es sabido que en el lenguaje imperialista “transición a la democracia” significa “regreso al redil”. Afganistán, Irak y Libia lo están padeciendo.

The Economist, critica la debilidad que muestra EE.UU. ante las presiones del lobby anticubano opuesto a toda negociación con la Isla y considera que, si no hay en Cuba cambios satisfactorios para Occidente, sobrevendrá una guerra civil que sería un baño de sangre.

En el colmo de desconocimiento de los motivaciones patrióticas de los cubanos que dan solidez a la revolución, especula el editorial que las poderosas y eficientes fuerzas de seguridad e inteligencia cubanas se convertirían, en medio del caos, en mercenarios al servicio del crimen organizado y el narcotráfico, al verse atraídos al conflicto los cubanoamericanos del sur de la Florida.

Pero donde el artículo de *The Economist* muestra peor calidad de periodismo, desde el punto de vista técnico y profesional, es en las conclusiones cuando define a Cuba como “esquina declinante de una América Latina en ascenso y en gran parte democrática”.

Sin reconocer que el actual ascenso de Latinoamérica y los avances democráticos en la región son, en sobresaliente medida, fruto de la exitosa resistencia de los cubanos al asedio de Estados Unidos a lo largo de más de medio siglo, el editorial del *The Economist* llama a Washington a un cambio de su política:

“Tras 50 años en los que ha sido una excepción, el destino de la isla se parece crecientemente al de la región. Es tiempo de que aquellos a ambos lados de estrecho de la Florida lo reconozcan. Medio siglo de fracasos es evidencia suficiente para apoyar un cambio de política”, afirma la revista de los grandes capitalistas británicos.

Cuba ha demostrado que la sumisión a Washington no es una predestinación insalvable para las naciones del hemisferio y que la independencia de los pueblos sometidos en todo el mundo es viable y sostenible a base de resistencia, sacrificio, coraje y solidaridad.

Marzo de 2012.

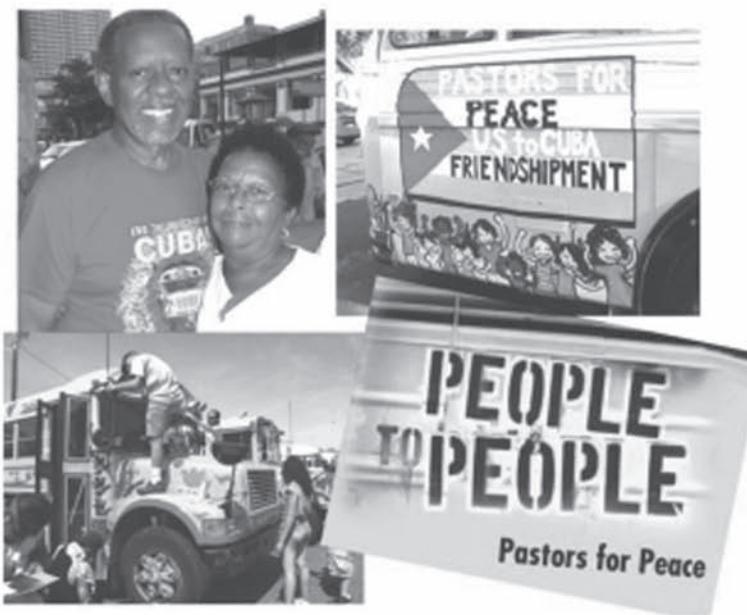
**Manuel E. Yepe Menendez es periodista y se desempeña como Profesor adjunto en el Instituto Superior de las Relaciones Internacionales de La Habana.*



Primero de Mayo - Habana, Cuba 2011

See Cuba for Yourself and Challenge the US Blockade!

20th Anniversary Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba July 1st - July 31th 2012



By Alison Bodine

WHAT IS THE PASTORS FOR PEACE CARAVAN TO CUBA

This summer for the 23rd time, the Pastors for Peace Friendship Caravan to Cuba will challenge the United State's government's economic and travel blockade on Cuba, that has been imposed by the U.S. government on the Cuban people for over 50 years. The Caravan will travel through up to 140 cities in the U.S. and Canada, raising awareness about the U.S. blockade and gathering humanitarian aid to take to Cuba. After two weeks of traveling through the U.S. there is a blockade-busting border crossing into Mexico when participants directly break U.S. law in an act

of civil disobedience by taking humanitarian aid that is destined for Cuba across the border into Mexico. Participants will then travel through Mexico and depart for nine days in Cuba, participating in a variety of educational and cultural events.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Pastors for Peace Caravans to Cuba. Over the past 20 years thousands of participants and over 30000 tons of humanitarian aid have been brought to Cuba, building a 'people-to-people' foreign policy based on mutual respect, solidarity and friendship between the people of the U.S. and Cuba.

Now is the time to secure your spot on the bus!

For more information on the Caravan please visit: www.pastorsforpeace.org

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Here in British Columbia, Canada, the BC Aid Network for Cuba (BCANC) will once again be collecting humanitarian aid to send on the Pastors for Peace Caravan and encouraging people in BC and Canada to do all that they can to support this important project. We are looking for assistance from all peace and social justice minded people in BC to join us in making the 23rd Caravan to Cuba a great success!

Despite growing world-wide opinion against the U.S. blockade, this cruel policy still remains in full effect. As people in BC and Canada we must join in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the U.S. There are three fundamental ways that you can get involved:

- 1 Collect aid from across British Columbia to send to Cuba.
- 2 Collect financial donations, especially fundraising, across BC to help pay the cost of getting the aid all the way from BC to Cuba.
- 3 Help BCANC to encourage people to travel with the Caravan through the US and Mexico to Cuba.

For more information and to get involved with BCANC visit:

www.bcanc.net



By Saul Landau*

The Syrian conflict continued to boil – or boil over – when Syrian troops fired across the Turkish border on April 9, apparently killing either fleeing refugees or armed combatants. However, despite continued words of caution from the Pentagon and White House about getting into another messy Middle East war, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton pressed for more intervention. The Syrian Accountability Act of 2003 began the formal U.S. attempt to bring down Assad, but the imperial princess Clinton now demands Syrian President Assad resign in favor of the Syrian National Council (SNC). This hastily formed group composed of exiled Syrian Muslim Brotherhood members, and other groupings, many in exile, would magically transform Syria via fair elections into a good democracy – and sheep will fly.

Washington's "humanitarian" assistance fund for Syria escalated into "non-lethal" aid – sophisticated satellite communications equipment, and

of dissent emerged. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said: "We reject any arming [of Syrian rebels] and the process to overthrow the [Assad] regime, because this will leave a greater crisis in the region."

Al-Maliki questioned the motives of Qatar and Saudi Arabia who "are calling for sending arms instead of working on putting out the fire."

Iraq, he continued, opposed "arming" the Free Syrian Army and he feared, "those countries that are interfering in Syria's internal affairs will interfere in the internal affairs of any country."

Maliki, who governs Iraq as a result of the U.S. invasion and devastation of that country, questioned equating a cause backed by Saudi funding with freedom.

"What's wrong with the Free Syrian Army getting funding from Saudi Arabia? Or, when did Saudi Arabia ever support freedom?" he asked.

These remarks were not featured in headlined stories; nor did TV or radio

news provide coverage of Maliki's statement. Until recently, we might have depended on Al-Jazeera, whose Iraq war coverage won it praise from journalists. However, the network's Syria reports led some reporters to resign over the network's biased reporting. Hassan Shaaban, the Beirut bureau's managing director, resigned in March, "after leaked emails revealed his

frustration over the channel's coverage." Shaaban had filed a story showing

armed men fighting with the Syrian army in Wadi Khalid. Al Jazeera dropped the story. Two other Al-Jazeera staff quit for the same reasons.

Al Akhbar calimed Qatar's foreign policy influenced the reporting on Syria. Al Jazeera maintains headquarters in Qatar and the royal family helped establish the network.

The question in Washington should be: will adding fuel to the violence make matters worse? Assad's forces have defeated – with huge civilian casualties – the formal rebel uprisings, but the SNC could sponsor a prolonged terrorist war, which would increase civilian casualties, and not succeed in removing Assad or his Party [the Baath Party] from power.

Logic and reason dictate that Obama should follow the Syrian majority. A February 2012 poll showed "55% of Syrians want Assad to stay," [not] motivated by fondness for his government, but "by fear of civil war." The polls also ascertained "that half the Syrians who accept him staying in power believe he must usher in free elections in the near future." The YouGov Siraj poll on Syria was commissioned by The Doha



Debates and funded by the Qatar Foundation, which is disconnected to the royal family. The family has taken a hawkish position on Syria.

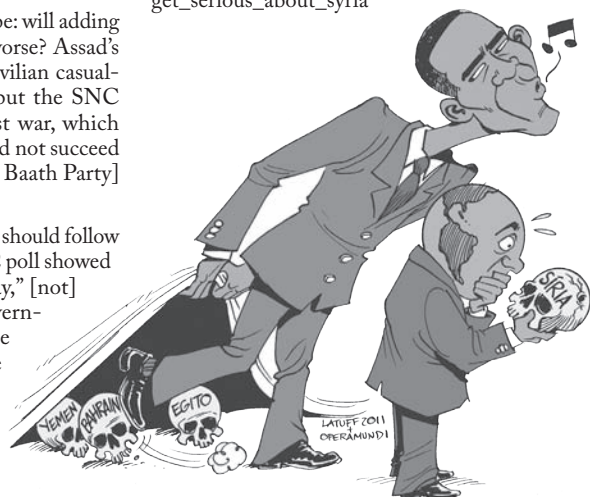
These facts have not oozed into State Department consciousness, where the rush for U.S. entanglement appears contagious. Good sense should command Secretary Clinton to help save the process former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan set in motion for a negotiated cease fire. The opposition and the Assad side negated the April 10 deadline. This means Syrians will pay a higher human toll. The suffering is already immense.

On April 14, the UN Security Council backed a deployment of the first wave of U.N. military observers to monitor the tentative cease-fire between the Syrian government and opposition combatants. Before the arrangements become final, Washington should weigh in now with Russia, China and the western powers – not Saudi Arabia and Qatar – to pressure both sides to stop shooting and start serious talking.

**Saul Landau, Saul is Professor Emeritus at California State University, Pomona, and a senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies at the Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. He has produced more than 40 films on social, political and historical issues, and worldwide human rights, throughout his career. Throughout his career, he has been the recipient of the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award, the George Polk Award for Investigative Reporting, and the First Amendment Award, as well as an Emmy for "Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang." Professor Landau's most recent film, "Will the Real Terrorist Please Stand Up?" was screened at this year's Vancouver International Film Festival.*

Source: Institute of Public Studies (IPS)

http://www.ips-dc.org/articles/get_serious_about_syria



night-vision goggles so "rebels" could "evade" Syrian government assaults.

U.S. and Western media have underscored Assad's butchery, but offered little of substance on the opposition and its often savage behavior. Just weeks after the first March 2011 protests – Arab Springtime – the media disregarded eyewitness evidence of armed groups shooting at and killing members of Syria's security forces as well as civilians. Reporter Pepe Escobar witnessed "the shooting deaths of nine Syrian soldiers in Banyas" as early as April 10, 2011.

By focusing only on Assad's violence, Western leaders could promote a lopsided view of the conflict. In recent weeks, however, the media could not ignore all "photos and video footage of armed men with heavy weapons proudly declaring their stripes – some of them religious extremists advocating the killing of civilians based on sectarian differences."

Suicide bombings took place in Damascus and Aleppo, and Al Qaeda called its minions "to battle." The U.S. government ignored Al Qaeda's role and refers only to the "good" SNC, the majority who appear to ally themselves with Syria's Muslim Brotherhood.

At a March meeting in Istanbul, sponsored by Turkey and Qatar, however, an unlikely source



TEACHERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA FIGHTING FOR BETTER PUBLIC EDUCATION

By Tamara Hansen

Where do you stand on the issue of British Columbian teachers and the British Columbian government? As a teacher, I have to ask because it seems, if the media and letters to the editor are any indication, that the public might not side with the government, but isn't totally ready to stand with teachers either.

Subsequently, the first question we have to ask is: should our society value free public education? If we answer 'yes', we must next ask: what is happening to free public education in BC, I would argue, a fundamental building block of our society?



In an article published in The Vancouver Sun and The Province (Vancouver) in February 2012, Susan Lambert, president of the BC Teacher's Federation (BCTF), writes, "In 1991-92 the Ministry of Education's budget was 26 per cent of the provincial budget. By 2009-10 it had shrunk to 15 per cent". Some people are arguing that we are in a special time of economic hardship and that everyone needs to tighten their belts. But is the public education system really the right place to tighten the collective belt? Can future generations of BC students afford this kind of prioritizing? These are questions that we need to be asking.

The conclusion that most teachers have come to is: no, we cannot afford to break down our hard-fought-for public education system. This is the main reason teachers in this province are taking a stand against the BC government's cuts and threats against public education, and I would like to ask you, dear reader, to join us.

What is happening to BC's public education system?

In September 2012, teachers began what was called "Phase 1" of their job action. In this phase, teachers refused to: prepare report cards, attend meetings with administration or parents outside of class time,



supervise detentions, and do some other mainly clerical duties. Phase 1 continued throughout the fall and into early 2012. This phase was designed to put pressure on the BC government to come to the negotiation table, while still maintain service to our students. At issue were two main things. First, the government's insistence on what it calls a "net-zero" mandate, saying there is no money to increase teacher salaries (even though BC teachers' pay ranks about 9th in Canada). The government also refused to discuss a pay increase for teachers just to keep up with the rate of inflation. Added to this are concerns about attacks on teachers'

health benefits and job security. The second issue, and more important issue for most teachers, is the government's refusal to discuss class sizes and composition, while promising that they want to improve education. The government has consistently refused to put its money where its mouth is.

On February 23, 2012, while teachers were still in Phase 1 job action, Trevor Hughes, assistant deputy minister of labour relations, released a report that had been ordered by the government. Hughes' report concluded that a negotiated settlement between both parties was "very unlikely." The release of this report changed the government's tone. They began planning to legislate an end to the Phase 1 job action and order teachers back to work. At the same time, teachers investigated ways to protest the government's plan to legislate.

An article in the Vancouver Sun on February 29, 2012, explained, "The province's Labour Relations Board ruled Tuesday afternoon that teachers can strike for three days in one week as part of their expanded job action, and then one day each subsequent week, though they must give two days' notice before striking. The strike ruling from the board came down just hours before the provincial government introduced its own



legislation aimed at ending the dispute.” So, while the BC government worked to pass its legislation, entitled Bill 22, or the “Education Improvement Act,” teachers walked off the job to show their disappointment and anger at the government’s decision to legislate instead of negotiate and to demand that their rights as unionized professionals be respected by the government.

Bill 22, or the “Education Improvement Act”

On March 15, 2012, the BC government passed the so-called “Education Improvement Act” – Bill 22. It states, “every employee must continue or resume his or her full duties and work schedules of employment with the employer.” The BC government tried to sell its “Education Improvement Act” as a solution to teachers’ demands for consultation regarding class size and composition. In a press release sent on March 15, 2012, the Ministry of Education wrote, “Bill 22 also implements a new Learning Improvement Fund of \$165 million over three years to help school districts and teachers address complex classroom composition issues. This fall, \$30 million from the Learning Improvement Fund will be allocated to classrooms with the greatest need. This will be increased to \$60 million the following year, and to \$75 million every year after that. [...] The Education Improvement Act provides for additional compensation to teachers with classes exceeding the maximum 30 students in grades four to 12.”



BCTF responded by reminding the BC government of its previous record on this issue. They wrote, “[t]en years ago, the Liberal government estimated they could save \$275 million per year by removing class size and composition provisions from the teachers’ collective agreement. Ten years later in Budget 2012, the Ministry of Education announced a Learning Improvement Fund to address class composition issues, comprised



of \$30 million in 2012–13, \$60 million in 2013–14, and \$75 million in 2014–15. Even in Year 3, when LIF funding increases to \$75 million, this amount is \$200 million less than the government’s estimated cost of class size and composition provisions in 2002.” Where did this saved money go? Who has benefited from saving it? Has the situation in the classrooms improved for students? Susan Lambert called Bill 22, “the height of political hypocrisy. It will erode the quality of education.” This seems to be the path the government has been on now for some time and Bill 22 shows that they are not planning to stop.

Additionally, “The Education Improvement Act” is meant to intimidate teachers into silence. First, it ends teachers’ ability to strike legally and left teachers with very few ways to voice their discontent and make their demands heard. Secondly, according to Ian Austin’s article in The Province newspaper on February 29, 2012, “The Education Improvement Act provides for huge fines for each day of strike action – at least \$1.3 million for the union and \$2,500 for its officials, and up to \$475 for individual teachers.” Obviously this is meant to strike fear in the hearts of teachers. However, on April 19, 2012, BCTF members voted 73% in favor of a nine point action plan to fight against this so-called “Education Improvement Act”, demonstrating that we are not interested in lining up behind the BC government’s plan. We are ready and willing to defend our principles and, of course, our students.

The BCTF’s nine point action plan has been reduced by the media to just the withdrawal of extracurricular services and a potential future vote to walk off the job. However, the plan also involves a full commitment to teaching and doing the job we are paid

to do. It also involves a commitment to organizing a public awareness campaign about the harm that legislation like Bill 22 is doing to our education system.

How could “net-zero” be acceptable for any working people in BC?

In her article, “Why I believe the BC government wage freeze is indefensible,” Tara Ehrcke, the president of the Greater Victoria Teachers’ Association, explains, “Inflation is running at about 3%. This means that a 0% increase amounts to a pay cut for teachers. Zero over two years would be a 6% pay cut.” Now teachers are suggesting that if the government thinks we are worth “net-zero”, to protest we will work in a “net-zero” mandate of our own. We will refuse to do work we are not paid for, work that is not obligated by our contract. That means we don’t need to put in the extra time organizing field trips, coaching or teaching extracurricular activities, or helping students at lunch. In fact, if I was a “net-zero” teacher I would stop buying small prizes out of my own pocket for the educational games we play in class and stop lending out my pencils and pens to the students who chronically forget theirs.

But isn’t this beginning to sound a bit childish? Even in my limited experience, no matter how furious teachers are about Bill 22 and how many threats we make, most are continuing to help students outside of class time because we feel too guilty not to! We feel a sense of duty. We are volunteers and helpers by nature; however, we are tired of having these ‘extras’ treated as expectations. We need to remind the public that all teachers in BC volunteer outside of class, none of us are regularly “net-zero” workers. But,

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the best way to jog the public's memory about all of the extra work we do is to stop doing it and, because of Bill 22, it is one of the only legal avenues of protest left to us.

Teacher job action: 'Kids will pay the price'?

As a teacher it is very difficult to pick up a newspaper these days and not feel enraged and saddened by the daily slander against our profession. If the mainstream media is to be believed, we are basically a union of close to 41,000 irrational lazy radicals. That is, of course, except those few teachers who have spoken out against the union (those who are ready to roll over for the government and its unfair policies). They are the "courageous" ones, according to an April 6 editorial in Vancouver's *The Province*.

Everyone is saying that with teacher's committing to stop extracurricular participation, 'Kids will pay the price.' What does this mean? Yes, current students are paying a certain price for teacher job action, but ultimately the job action is to save the public education system. A public education system supposes to provide each young person in BC with a world-class education equally without bias of where they grow up or their family income. Our public education system today is already underfunded and unequal across the province. Schools that are in wealthier areas are better off because of parent, student and teacher fundraising. Already we have gaps in what we have promised future generations and what is being delivered. The government of BC has its eyes shut and is happy to deepen the inequality. In fact, on the first day of the teacher strike, BC premier Christy Clark was scheduled to speak at a private school in Chilliwack. What message was she trying to send the public?

A new model for BC

One place that I always look to as an example is Cuba. Some of you reading this article will immediately know what connection I am trying to make and others may not. Cuba is a country with a socialist government, a government that is

putting the advancement of people before profit. Cuba is also a developing, or third world country, with few natural resources and export industries like Canada. Yet Cuba has free public education up to and including University degrees and PhDs.

After the 1959 revolution, the new Cuban government created a literacy campaign which eradicated illiteracy from Cuba by 1961. From this campaign Cuba has developed the "Yo si puedo" literacy method. This has become famous world-wide and was even adapted into the "ArrowMight" program being used to promote literacy in Indigenous communities across Canada and around the



world.

According to UNICEF, from 2000-2009, the Canadian government allocated about 3% of its expenditures to education. In an article published in the *Independent* (published in England, www.independent.co.uk) in November 2010 entitled, "Latin lessons: What can we learn from the world's most ambitious literacy campaign?" it explains that, "Cuba spends 10 per cent of its central budget on education, compared with 4 per cent in the UK and just 2 per cent in the US, according to Unesco." How can Cuba afford it and we here in Canada, and British Columbia in particular, cannot?

Not only that, but when we are debating class sizes and composition, we can also look to Cuba's leadership. The same article from the *Independent* explains, "there is a strict maximum of 25 children per primary-school class, many of which

have as few as 20. Secondary schools are striving towards only 15 pupils per class." While the government of Cuba has created a goal of one teacher for every 15 students in high schools, here in BC we are fighting tooth and nail for less than 30 per class. So arguments about needing to cut funding or tightening our belt do not stand up when measured against Cuba. What needs to change are our government's priorities!

How can we support teachers?

If you are interesting in support free public education:

- Support teachers by supporting the BCTF's line of action.

- Form a parents or students group that supports teachers; it is always nice to know we are not alone.

- Write a letter of protest to the BC government and Minister of Education. Let them know what you think about Bill 22 and the state of public education in BC.

- Send emails and letters to school administrators in support of teachers. Let them know what you think about Bill 22 and the state of public education in BC.

Contrary to what mainstream media and the BC government are saying, teachers and the BCTF are not hot-headed irrational radicals. In many ways we have been extremely patient and have kept working through torn-up contracts, deepening cuts and even court rulings that found that the doings of the BC government are illegal. We have been pushing, testing, organizing, and occasionally striking throughout the years for a just contract and fair classroom conditions. Despite the government's extreme action of legislating us back to work, we are not disrupting class time, we are filing our report cards and getting our job done. Nonetheless, this status-quo cannot last for long. Teachers are too upset and angry about what is being done to BC's public education system. The current conditions cannot go on, especially when the government only seems to be planning to make it worse. Let's find a way to come together and work towards building a free public education system in BC that we can be proud of.

Mensaje de René González al pueblo de Cuba

14 de abril de 2012 "Año 53 de la Revolución"

Queridos compatriotas:

De regreso al mundo del absurdo tras una muy breve visita a la patria que ha suscitado en algunos las más diversas elucubraciones -muchas de un nivel de insania que sólo los detractores de nuestra sociedad pueden ejercitar- es tiempo de saldar una deuda con nuestro pueblo a través de estas palabras. No van dirigidas a quienes esperaban criticarnos anticipando que mi estancia en Cuba se convirtiera en un acto político y ahora lo hacen porque resultó en un ejemplo de discreción; ni a los que auguraban que no regresaría y ahora se buscan las más disímiles racionalizaciones porque lo hice. Se trata del elemental deber ante un pueblo que recibió como suyo el alivio que significó este paréntesis, muchos de cuyos hijos en el mejor espíritu solidario y generoso esperaban seguir mi visita. Sólo a estos últimos las debo.

Como bien se informó la solicitud de mi viaje a Cuba tuvo un carácter humanitario en el marco de la letra y el espíritu de la figura jurídica de libertad supervisada. No se trató ni de un favor ni de una demanda política, sino de una situación prevista por las leyes y cuya solución fue tramitada en el más estricto apego a las mismas. En el mismo ánimo de respeto a la legalidad que nos ha guiado desde el principio de este proceso era imprescindible que no convirtiéramos mi estancia en la patria en algo que no se ajustara a la naturaleza de tal solicitud. En ello iba nuestra palabra y se ponía en juego el espacio moral que durante estos años hemos conquistado, los cinco, en esta historia.

De lo anterior se desprende la poca exposición que se dio a la visita, y que puede haber parecido sorprendente para algunos. Estamos seguros de que esta explicación será comprendida por todos los que nos quieren, y que veían en mi estancia la posibilidad de algunas demostraciones públicas de regocijo y alegría. Las limitaciones que impuso la naturaleza de mi

viaje hicieron esto imposible, más allá de lo que se pudo propiciar espontáneamente en algunos lugares en que mi presencia era ineludible por razones de obligado agradecimiento o pasadas vivencias; añadidas las restricciones de tiempo dadas por el encuentro con mi familia y el compartir con mi hermano enfermo; motivo directo de mi viaje.

De mis breves andares por nuestras calles y del contacto espontáneo con parte de nuestro pueblo me traigo recuerdos imborrables, que me sirven de inspiración y me dan fuerzas. De cubanos de todas las procedencias recibí en estos días un cariño fluido, sincero, respetuoso de la condición de mi visita y de la discreción que requería, expresado en todas las maneras posibles. Sé que a través de cada uno de esos compatriotas me estaba llegando el afecto de los millones que hubieran querido estar al tanto de nuestra estancia. A todos -tanto los que me privilegiaron con su contacto como los que no- les quiero expresar mi profundo agradecimiento ya sea por sus muestras de generoso respeto como por sus expresiones de solidaridad y buenos deseos para con mi hermano.

De regreso al mundo del absurdo me dispongo a seguir en esta larga batalla porque se nos haga justicia. Era imprescindible que mi conducta en Cuba fuera de extrema moderación. Era impensable que no regresara. Me traigo en el corazón las intensas vivencias de estos hermosos catorce días junto a mi pueblo, con el que algún día celebraremos el regreso de los Cinco.

Por lo pronto a todos, en nombre de mi familia y en el propio, llegue nuestro más profundo agradecimiento.

Y en nombre de los Cinco les reitero que no les fallaremos y seremos siempre dignos de ustedes.

Un fuerte abrazo. René González Schwerert*



René González a la salida de la prisión de Marianna, en la Florida, el 7 de octubre de 2011.
René González exiting prison in Marianna, in Florida, October 7, 2011.

A MESSAGE FROM RENÉ GONZÁLEZ TO THE PEOPLE OF CUBA

April 14, 2012 "Year 54 of the Revolution"

Dear compatriots:

Returning to the world of the absurd after a very brief visit to the homeland which has led to the most diverse ramblings – some at a level of insanity only possible for the detractors of our society – it's time for me to pay a debt I owe to my people with these words. They are not directed to those who were hoping to criticize us, anticipating that my stay in Cuba would become a political event and are now doing so because it was so discreet. Nor are these words directed to those who predicted I would not return and are now seeking the most diverse rationalizations to explain what I did. This is about an elemental responsibility I have to a people who felt as their own the respite offered by my brief visit, many of whom hoped to follow my visit in a spirit of solidarity and generosity. I owe these words only to this last group.

As has been reported, my request to travel to Cuba was of a humanitarian nature, within the letter and spirit of the legal framework established for my supervised release. It did not represent a favor or a political demand, but rather a situation which had been foreseen within the law, which was resolved strictly adhering to the legal stipulations. In this same spirit of respect for the law which has guided us from the beginning of this process, it was absolutely necessary that my stay in the homeland not include anything which did not conform to the nature of my request. We had given our word and the moral authority, which the Five have won over the years throughout this story, was in the balance.

This was the reason for the lack of exposure given my visit, which may have seemed surprising to some. I'm sure that this explanation will be understood by all who love us and who saw my visit as an opportunity for public demonstrations of joy and happiness. The limitations imposed by the nature of my trip made this impossible, beyond that which occurred spontaneously in a few places where my presence was required given the obligation to express my gratitude or shared experiences, in addition to the limitations on my time which was devoted to the reunion with my family and visiting my ill brother, the concrete reason for my trip.

I have returned with unforgettable memories of the brief moments I walked along our streets and the spontaneous contact with some of our people, which are a source of inspiration and give me strength. I received during these days, from Cubans in all walks of life, open and sincere affection, always respectful of the conditions under which my visit took place and with the discretion required, in the most diverse expressions. I knew that by way of everyone of these compatriots, I was receiving the affection of millions who would have liked to have known about my stay. To all – those who I had the privilege of meeting and those I did not – I would like to express my most profound gratitude, be it for your generous demonstrations of respect, your expressions of solidarity or best wishes for my brother.

Returning to the world of the absurd, I will devote myself to continuing this long battle for justice. It was absolutely necessary that my behavior in Cuba be extremely cautious. It was absolutely necessary that I return. I carry in my heart the intense experiences of those beautiful 14 days with my people, with whom I will someday celebrate the return of the Five.

For now, to all of you, in the name of my family and my own, I send you our most profound gratitude.

And in the name of the Five, I reiterate that we will not fail you and will always strive to be worthy of your support.

A firm embrace. René González Schwerert*

On March 30th, Rene Gonzalez set foot in his homeland of Cuba for the first time in more than 13 long years. However, for this political prisoner held in the United States, the return was bittersweet. Rene was only granted two weeks by a US judge to visit his brother Roberto, who is terminally ill with cancer. He will soon board a return flight to the US where he has 3 more years of probation to serve, and where four more Cuban men continue to serve inhumanely long prison sentences for the "crime" of exposing US-based terrorist organizations attacking Cuba. - LET RENÉ GONZÁLEZ RETURN TO CUBA PERMANENTLY!

Cuba:

Looking back and ahead

*By Saul Landau and Nelson Valdés**

In 2012, the White House will focus on the most important of international and national issues: the re-election of the President. U.S.-Cuba policy will fall into “Next Year’s” box – or the year after that. The National Security staff reverts to its familiar positions on relations with that troublesome island: ignorance and arrogance.

Few Americans even in the Foreign Service know the Cuban revolution began in the 1860s as a war of independence against Spain.

Spain prevailed in the 1860s war, as did Cuban slavery until 1886. Unlike the 1776 war for independence, the struggle in Cuba confronted a major social issue, which U.S. Founding Fathers had finessed – until the Civil War in 1861.

In January 1959, after almost 100 years of on-and-off combat, the 26th of July guerrillas marched into Havana as winners of the decisive round. The revolutionaries carried another ancestral platform: social justice and

equality.

Cubans knew well how Washington had acted as their destiny blocker. By 1898, Cuban “independentistas” had almost defeated Spain. The United States intervened to thwart that goal. Washington imposed the Platt Amendment on Cuba’s constitution, giving itself the right to intervene in Cuban affairs, and a naval base in Guantanamo – now a prison and torture chamber. The United States intruded several times in the 20th Century to alter the island’s fate, including in events following the 1933 overthrow of the Machado dictatorship: to prevent revolutionaries from acquiring sovereignty.

That political-military exercise led to the Fulgencio Batista era (1934-1958) – in which the new U.S.-trained and bonded military held sway.

In 1958, however, Washington lost confidence in Batista’s ability to stop social revolution, and began plotting unsuccessfully with a clique of high military officials to replace Batista with a junta – ala 1934.

The revolutionaries’ victory in 1959 changed Cuba’s destiny. In 1960, after consolidating power, they made “Patria o Muerte” (homeland or death) the national slogan, referring to the long-sought goal. 1930s revolutionaries joined the 1950s rebels in a unity program: build a proud, healthy and literate nation, bound by ideals of social justice, equality and sovereignty.

Cubans were offered the chance to become actors on the stage of their own history. Millions left their homes to teach literacy, or joined militias, and voluntary associations to transform the island from dependency and underdevelopment into healthy development.

Cuba’s revolutionary tradition assumed that a sovereign nation would use its



Two women working at a cooperative farm, Artemisa, May 2012.



Cuban youth celebrate Fidel Castro’s birthday, Santa Clara, August 2009.



Cuban youth draw art about the environment and HIV/AIDS, August 2009.



Fidel Castro cuts sugar cane, 1961.

resources to benefit its people. Rich soil and industrious workers would provide everyone with a decent living standard. Poverty, most assumed, derived from foreign or domestic exploitation.

Early laws restricting landlords and large foreign and Cuban property owners allowed the government to distribute resources and services to the population, which won more legitimacy for the revolutionaries. But Cuba’s accumulated wealth would prove superficial compared to its needs.



Havana, May 1, 2011.

Soviet aid and trade, could Cuba's economy survive? The unthinkable alternative, surrender to Washington, led Cuban leaders to design the "special period" – a daily juggling for survival. Euphoria prevailed in Washington. Scholars announced "the end of history," capitalism had won – well, if one ignored the cyclical disasters. Computers and the Internet would remake the world. China and Vietnam had already abandoned communism – in all but name. Cuba remained the "Jurassic state".

Without even major trade partners, Cuba's leaders at first relied on abstractions: national honor, patriotism and shared sacrifice, hardly adequate weapons to fight a 32% GNP drop in one year.

Circumstances dictated that Cuba earn money from foreign tourists, who required a service oriented labor force – including prostitution. Cuba permitted remittances, which created inequality. Working Cubans earned less than non-workers who got rewarded by family members abroad.

Cuba began earning dollars for doctors' and educators' services abroad. In turn, this reduced the breadth and quality of education and health care at home.

Living standards fell. Theft, black markets and corruption tied to bureaucracy grew. Those too young to experience the days of subsidized consumption became pessimistic – even cynical – and desperate about their future. Complaining reached theatrical height. As leaders repeated old slogans teenagers passing below signs of Che Guevara reading "Como el Che," would often say "Si, asmático." (Like Che ... yes, asthmatic.) Some opted for rafts to Florida.

Meanwhile, the revolutionaries maintained political power and withstood two

decades of counter revolutionary efforts from abroad. By 2001, Cuba's economy and administrative structures had begun to fall into dysfunction. Corruption levels became intolerable; the once exciting revolutionary script sounded trite.

When Hugo Chavez became president of Venezuela, he provided Cuba with aid and political alliances. Additionally, Latin America accepted Havana as a full partner, ending Cuba's isolation

Recently, Cuba's Communist Party reviewed the economy. A new script began to emerge as a series of guidelines (lineamientos). Changes have begun to affect property rights, domestic trade, employment practices, and investments.

In 2012, Cuban leaders could forge a new mission, to remake Cubans as the inspiration – if not saviors – of human life on the planet. Part of Cuba's population still vibrates with desires to act on the world stage with a script the world's people need.

Imagine Cuba leading a green revolution for survival! They have the science, experience and organization. Will the leadership pass the torch to those who have the energy and will to carry it out?

Next week: how Fidel Castro laid the groundwork for an environmental mission.

** Saul Landau is an internationally known scholar, author, commentator, and filmmaker on foreign and domestic policy issues. Saul Landau has been a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies since 1972. Saul's newest film is "Will the Real Terrorist Please Standup"*

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Over the first decades, children of illiterate Cubans earned PhDs, and became doctors and soldiers who volunteered to go abroad to help change destiny in Africa and Latin America. Others volunteered for arduous tasks of construction and agriculture. By the mid 1970s Cuba had become literate and healthy.

To accomplish the overwhelming tasks of development revolutionary leaders had accepted Soviet help. This uneasy, but convenient marriage from 1972-1985 included adopting the Soviet economic and administrative models.

For Cuba the deal meant soft loans, technical assistance, secure supply lines and a high-paying market for its products. While most third world countries transferred capital to developed countries, the Cuba-Soviet agreement reversed the pattern, permitting the island to have sovereignty, social justice and relative equality. Cubans also became world-renowned artists, writers and athletes.

For the Soviets, Cuba became a legitimizing instrument to maintain credibility among third world peoples, playing a broker-like role for Soviet positions at third world meetings.

On July 26, 1989, however, Fidel Castro warned of the impending demise of the Soviet bloc. Cubans had to prepare. The enemy 90 miles away loomed as a constant threat to the revolution's goals.

In 1991, the Soviet Union died. Without



Reflections of Fidel

THE MARVELOUS WORLD OF CAPITALISM

The search for political truth will always be a difficult task, even in our times when science has placed a large body of knowledge in our hands. One of the most significant aspects of this scientific knowledge has been learning of and studying the fabulous power of energy contained in matter.

The discoverer of this energy and its potential use was a peaceful and good-natured man who, in spite of his repudiation of violence and war, sought its development in the United States, during the Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was known to have an anti-fascist position, and the leader of a capitalist country in deep crisis, which he had contributed to saving with strong measures which earned him the hatred of the extreme right wing of his own class. Today, this state is imposing on the world the most brutal and dangerous dictatorship that our fragile species has known.

Cables from the United States and its NATO allies refer to the crimes committed by these countries and their accomplices. The most important cities of the United States and Europe are seeing constant pitched battles between demonstrators and well trained and fed police agents, with armored cars and protective gear, dispensing blows and kickings and firing gases at women and men, arm-locking the hands and necks of young and old, displaying to the world actions being committed against the rights and lives of citizens of their own countries.

For how much longer will these barbarities continue?

In order not to write extensively, given that these tragedies will be ever-increasingly presented on television and through the press in general, and will be like the bread denied every day to those who have least, I will cite a report received today from an important Western news agency:

"Huge swathes of the Japanese Pacific coastline could be inundated, with 20-meter-plus (112ft) waves hitting areas from Tokyo down to the southwestern island of Kyushu, according to the revised calcula-

multinational, what type of technology would you crave?"

"Recently, certain well-known London luxury stores opened entire sections for technology lovers with fat wallets.

"Million-dollar televisions, Ferrari video cameras and personal submarines are some of the fetishes to delight millionaires."

"The million-dollar television is the jewel in the crown."

"In the case of Apple, the company is committed to supplying stores with its new products on the same day as their launch on the market."

"Let's suppose that we have left our mansion and are already bored with hanging out with our yacht, limousine, helicopter or jet. We still have the option of buying a personal submarine or one for two people."

The options continue with rust-proof cell phones, 1.2GHz word processors with 8G memory, NFC technol-

ogy for making payments by cell phone. Ferrari manufactured video cameras."

Compatriots, capitalism really is a marvelous thing! Perhaps we are to be blamed for every citizen not having a personal submarine on the beach.

It is they and not me who have put Arab sheiks and directors of large transnationals in the same bag along with football players. At least the latter entertain millions of people and are not enemies of Cuba. I must clarify that.

Fidel Castro Ruz
April 1, 2012



tions of a government panel.

"A 34-meter tsunami could hit the Japanese coast in the wake of a massive (Magnitude 9) earthquake, the expert panel said after revising its worst case scenario projections.

"In its previous projection in 2003 the panel gave a worst case scenario in which no areas would be hit by a tsunami of more than 20 meters (66ft).

"The Fukushima plant was designed to resist a 6-meter (20ft) tsunami, less than half the height of the wave that hit it on March 11, 2011."

But there is no cause for concern. Another cable datelined two days ago, March 30, can soothe such fears. It comes from a really well known news source. I will synthesize it in a few words: "If you were a football player, Arab sheik or director of a large



Reflexiones del Compañero Fidel

El mundo maravilloso del CAPITALISMO

La búsqueda de la verdad política siempre será una tarea dura, aun en nuestros tiempos cuando la ciencia ha puesto en nuestras manos un gran número de conocimientos. Uno de los más importantes fue conocer y estudiar el fabuloso poder de la energía contenida en la materia.

El descubridor de esa energía y su posible empleo era un hombre pacífico y bonachón que, a pesar de su repudio a la violencia y a la guerra, solicitó su desarrollo a Estados Unidos, presidido entonces por Franklin D. Roosevelt, de conocida posición antifascista, líder de un país capitalista en profunda crisis, que había contribuido a salvar con fuertes medidas que le ganaron el odio de la extrema derecha de su propia clase. Hoy ese Estado impone al mundo la más brutal y peligrosa tiranía que ha conocido nuestra frágil especie.

Los despachos procedentes de Estados Unidos y sus aliados de la OTAN se refieren a las fechorías cometidas por ellos y sus cómplices. Las ciudades más importantes de Estados Unidos y de Europa reflejan constantes batallas campales entre los manifestantes y la policía bien entrenada y alimentada, con carros blindados y escafandras, repartiendo golpes, patadas y gases contra mujeres y hombres, torciendo manos y cuellos de jóvenes y viejos, mostrando al mundo las cobardes acciones que se cometen contra los derechos y la vida de los ciudadanos de sus propios países.

¿Hasta cuándo pueden durar semejantes barbaries?

Para no ser extenso, ya que estas tragedias se irán presentando cada vez más por la televisión y la prensa en general, y serán como el pan que cada día se niega a los que menos tienen, citaré el despacho cablegráfico, recibido hoy, de una importante agencia de noticias occidental:

“Buena parte de las costas japonesas del Pacífico podrían quedar inundadas por una ola gigantesca superior a los 34 metros (112 pies) si se produjera un sismo poderoso, según los cálculos revisados de un panel del gobierno.

“Cualquier tsunami desencadenado por un terremoto de magnitud 9 en la depresión

“Recientemente, unos conocidos almacenes de lujo en Londres inauguraron una sección entera dedicada a amantes de la tecnología con abultadas billeteras.

“Televisores de un millón de dólares, cámaras de video Ferrari y submarinos individuales son algunos de los fetiches para hacer las delicias del millonario.”

“El televisor del millón de dólares es la joya de la corona.”

“En el caso de Apple, la empresa se compromete a entregar sus nuevos productos el mismo día de lanzamiento en el mercado.”

“Pongamos que hemos salido de nuestra mansión y ya estamos cansados de rondar por ahí con nuestro yate, limousine, helicóptero o jet. Todavía nos queda la opción de comprar un submarino individual o para dos personas.”

La oferta prosigue con celulares con carcasa de acero inoxidable, procesador de 1,2 GHz y 8 G de memoria, y tecnología NFC para realizar pagos a través del celular. Videocámara con sello Ferrari.

¡Verdad compatriotas que el capitalismo es cosa maravillosa! Quizás nosotros seamos culpables de que cada ciudadano no tenga un submarino particular en la playa.

Son ellos y no yo quien mezcló en este mismo saco a los jeques árabes y los directivos de las grandes transnacionales con los futbolistas. Al menos estos últimos entretienen a millones de personas y no son enemigos de Cuba. Debo aclararlo.

Fidel Castro Ruz
Abril 1 de 2012

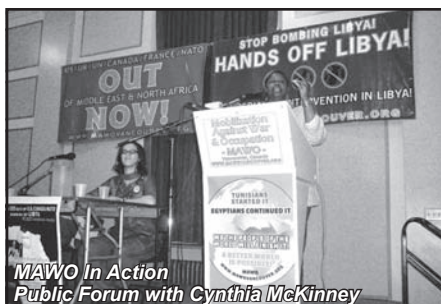


de Nankai, que va desde la principal isla nipona de Honshu hasta la isla sureña de Kyushu, podría alcanzar los 34 metros de altura, señaló el comité.

“Un cálculo anterior en el 2003 estimaba que la altura máxima de dicha ola sería inferior a los 20 metros (66 pies).”

“La planta de Fukushima había sido diseñada para resistir un tsunami de 6 metros (20 pies), menos de la mitad de altura de la ola que la impactó el 11 de marzo del 2011.”

Pero no hay razones para preocuparse. Otro despacho fechado hace dos días, el 30 de marzo, nos puede tranquilizar. Procede de un medio realmente bien informado. En breves palabras sintetizaré: “Si usted fuera futbolista, jeque árabe o directivo de una gran multinacional ¿Qué tipo de tecnología le haría suspirar?”



MAWO'S OPEN LETTER TO: STOPWAR.CA AND THE CANADIAN PEACE ALLIANCE (CPA)

We at the Fire This Time Newspaper feel that the issues raised in the following letter are of great importance for the antiwar/anti occupation movement here in Canada and abroad.

APRIL 14, 2011

To Stopwar.ca and the Canadian Peace Alliance (CPA),

I

We in Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) are sending you this open correspondence to express the grave concerns we have with your organizing of the April 9th demonstration in Vancouver.



Your approach and politics on this day were without a doubt against the spirit of building an antiwar, anti-occupation movement not only in Canada but throughout the world. Imperialist countries and their military fronts such as NATO are beginning to sink their teeth into Libya while continuing the brutal

wars and occupations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Somalia, Sudan, Palestine and beyond. This is a crucial time for the antiwar movement and we need an open and honest discussion or risk seeing further capitulation to the pro-imperialist political and military campaign against Libya.

The CPA's cross-Canada participation in the April 9th International Day of Action called by the United National Antiwar Committee (UNAC) in the U.S. was a breakthrough in cross-border unified action. We have been advocating for years that working with U.S. groups and coalitions is an essential aspect of a strategy to build a broad, united and effective antiwar movement.

Thousands rallied in New York and San Francisco, while coordinated rallies were held in 10 Canadian and 6 Pakistani cities, as well as demonstrations in Iraq on April 9th. These mobilizations built on the momentum of other successful coordinated rallies called by the ANSWER Coalition on March 19th. This broadly coordinated action has been missing for too long from the antiwar movement in Canada, and we fully endorse

its continuation on a hopefully increasingly frequent basis. However, based on the events during the rally organized in Vancouver by Stopwar.ca and the CPA's public statements regarding the current

crisis and NATO bombing in Libya, we are concerned that the political direction of these actions in Canada is unclear at best, and could even be understood at worst as pro-war.

At the Stopwar.ca rally in Vancouver we saw that two speakers invited by Stopwar.ca spent 15 minutes justifying and advocating IN

FAVOUR of the current NATO bombing of Libya. Do the following quotations from the Stopwar.ca rally really have a place at an antiwar rally occurring in the midst of a bloody imperialist campaign to intervene in a civil war and overthrow the independent government of Libya?

- "If you don't want war on Libya, what is your alternative?"
- "He [Gaddafi] has an unbelievable media machine, he spends billions and billions that tries to paint the picture that NATO is bombing Libyan people. NATO is not bombing Libyan people!"
- "This [the bombing of Libya] is not like Iraq, this is not like Afghanistan, this is not a foreign occupier coming onto our land!"
- "If you don't want those people [foreign forces] to get inside of Libya and you want to stop them you are saying, 'Let Ghaddafi kill us!'"
- "You are giving us the wrong message. You are saying its okay for civilians to get killed but it is not okay for NATO to help us!"
- "Do you have a heart?!" (shouted at someone speaking against the bombing of Libya from



the crowd)

At least 10 people in the crowd responded to these pro-war speakers by shouting, "Stop bombing Libya!" while one of the more vocal critics of the pro-war speakers who is a long-time social justice organizer was surrounded and closed in on by three Stopwar.ca marshals. Even after it was clear to everyone involved what these pro-war Libyans were

advocating, the Stopwar.ca MCs invited yet another one to speak!

Stopwar.ca and CPA co-chair Derrick O'Keefe spoke at the end of the rally to



MAWO In Action
Rally and Petition Drive

confirm that they had invited these speakers knowing full well the pro-war message they were going to put forward. He said, "We

the so-called "truth" that the government of Canada is putting forward by participating in bombing the Libyan people!

Though Derrick O'Keefe mentioned that Stopwar.ca as a coalition had voted to oppose imperialist intervention in Libya, the time given to this supposed position was nothing compared to what was given to the pro-war Libyans. We must ask how Stopwar.ca can justify writing a statement which says they are "absolutely opposed to the NATO bombing of Libya, which is a shocking violation of the UN Charter and an act of war against a sovereign country" and then give such a huge amount of space to a pro-war message we can all hear 24/7 if we turn on CNN, FOX News, BBC or any of the other advocates of imperialist wars and occupations.

There is no justification for having pro-war

Because of our experience in Vancouver we are concerned that similar events played out in other demonstrations across Canada. Did these other rallies also have pro-war speakers? The CPA, as an umbrella antiwar orga-



MAWO In Action
Protest Picket

nization in Canada, has the responsibility to provide leadership and a clear political direction to its membership organizations, especially at such a crucial time.



MAWO In Action
Public Forum

invited the Libyan speakers who we've been in touch with even though there's a difference in opinion about NATO's intervention, we thought it was important for them to have their say." In fact, Derrick O'Keefe, and both of the Stopwar.ca MC's tried to justify this position to the rally, as if the pro-war position on Libya is somehow being unfairly under-represented. When Derrick O'Keefe said "We know its our job to stay on the streets and to bring the truth," this shouldn't mean

speakers at an antiwar rally. There is no space for presenting such confusion in a public action that is supposed to be about taking a stand against war and occupation.

Unfortunately we have seen examples of this kind of behavior from Stopwar.ca over the past several years and in the weeks leading up to the demonstration. For instance, Stopwar.ca has invited speakers who advocate the overthrow of the independent government of Iran in the midst of an imperialist campaign demanding the same. They have also promoted other speakers who have compromised antiwar, anti-occupation political principles. Most recently, leading up to April 9th Stopwar.ca played an active role in weekly demonstrations organized by pro-war Libyans. In supporting these demonstrations Stopwar.ca showed a complete indifference and lack of responsibility for their actions as an antiwar coalition in the midst of a new war opening against the people of Libya.

We have read the statement released by the CPA "Support the Libyan people. Yes to freedom and democracy across the Arab World! No Military Intervention in Libya." The confused position that was presented at the April 9th demonstration reflects this confused statement, which concludes, "The best way to help the people of Libya is to show our solidarity with their struggle." Our role as antiwar coalitions is not to take sides in

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Public Forum



MAWO In Action
Rally and Petition Drive

a civil war in an independent country under attack by imperialists, but to clearly oppose any form of foreign imperialist intervention which has never, and will never, benefit the people of that country. You can't have it both ways at once – to join in the imperialist campaign used to justify the bombings while saying that you oppose the bombings at the same time.

There is much to be learned from the coalitions that have organized rallies in the US since the imperialist campaign against Libya began. Through statements, as well as the March 19th, March 26th and April 9th mobilizations, organizations such as ANSWER, the International Action Center (IAC) and UNAC have taken a strong position against the current war on the people of Libya. The difference is that, in contrast to what we observed in Vancouver, in the US the actions of these antiwar and social justice organizations match their words. From the lead banners to the signs and rally speakers, to the UNAC report from NYC which stated, "The new war in Libya has given rise to a new movement, as the largest anti-war demonstration New York has seen in years took to the streets of Manhattan." There was no contradiction or confusion as they had the leadership to take a strong stance against imperialist intervention in Libya. This is an example for all of us to follow.

II

MAWO has been participating in the same efforts, in the spirit of anti-imperialism, co-operation, and antiwar movement building. Starting from even before the bombing of Libya began we have organized 5 forums and 3 rallies, as well as produced 2 buttons and launched a petition campaign, all against foreign intervention in Libya. We have also produced 3 antiwar newsletters filled with news and analysis to counter the lies being spread by imperialist media on Libya and the uprisings and mass movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Within this newsletter are ideas and statements we think are crucial at this time and are much more appropriate be said at antiwar rallies:

"There is no saving of human lives or any humanitarian intervention on behalf of the Libyan people that can be performed by imperialist powers. Indeed, this is such an obvious hypocrisy by these war mongers

because none of those precious human values mean anything to them. One, we haven't forgotten the killings of millions of people in Vietnam, more than a million people in Rwanda, killings of more than one million people in Iraq just from 2003 until now, as



MAWO In Action
Public Forum with Cliff Wells

well as hundreds of thousands of innocent people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Congo, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and many other poor and sovereign countries by the very same imperial powers."

Read MAWO Newsletter #32 in full at: <http://www.marwovancouver.org/materials/newsletters/newsletter32-5.pdf>

"This is a time to abandon all illusions that there might be anything progressive and human to overthrowing the Libyan government or helping the opposition in Libya through imperialist intervention such as sanctions, a no-fly zone or military attacks... The unfolding mass revolutionary movement and ousting of Mubarak and Ben Ali in Egypt and Tunisia have been a fresh struggle for anti-imperialist movements in the region. It certainly reversed the setback imposed on the working and poor people of the world through the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. What the great masses of North Africa and the Middle East need to see is not another Iraq but rather another Egypt."

(MAWO Newsletter #32)



MAWO In Action
Rally and Petition Drive

III

Since our founding on October 29, 2003 MAWO has always endorsed and supported Stopwar.ca, the CPA and other groups whenever they have organized antiwar work. However, we are also clear that we don't feel that bringing occasional celebrity speakers and holding sporadic events not connected to consistent campaigns is enough to even begin scratching the surface of building a strong antiwar movement. This is unlike what we have seen in the U.S. where there is a constant effort by different political tendencies to improve and build new fronts against imperialist aggression. We have rarely spoken out publicly about the huge blocks and slander we have faced for years in our efforts to work in a united way either with Stopwar.ca or the CPA, but now is not the time to remain silent. Now is not the time to remain divided based on petty or sectarian differences, now is the time to learn from the people of the Middle East and North Africa as they rise up and counter the imperialist domination they have faced for decades. Interestingly and ironically, as a Canadian-based coalition, more so than in Canada, our efforts for unity have had a great welcoming by U.S. coalitions and social justice groups such as ANSWER, UNAC, IAC, the Stop War On Iran coalition, IFCO/Pastors for Peace and others.

We are making a strong call to Stopwar.ca and the CPA:

1- Stop taking the unclear middle of the road path and arm yourselves with a clear antiwar, anti-occupation platform by rejecting saying one thing and doing the

opposite.

2- Organize an open, inclusive, broad and well organized public discussion on how to

build a united and effective antiwar movement in Canada and world-wide.

We believe these are the only serious options in response to the current situation. Today in a joint letter the presidents of the United States and France and the prime minister of Britain declared, "there can be no peace in Libya while Muammar Gaddafi stays in power," "Libyans in cities like Misrata and Ajdabiya continue to suffer 'terrible horrors at Gaddafi's hands'," "it is impossible to imagine a future for Libya with Gaddafi in power," "To allow him to remain in power 'would be an unconscionable betrayal' of Libya's people," "So long as Gaddafi is in power, NATO and its coalition partners must maintain their operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds," and finally "Then a genuine transition from dictatorship to an inclusive constitutional process can really begin, led by a new generation of leaders." All quotations are from the BBC, and the complete letter



MAWO In Action
Rally and Petition Drive

is in the Washington Post April 14, 2011. Isn't it clear what colonial powers are up to in Libya? Is this different than what the Libyan opposition or the pro-war Libyans that participated in your rally say? Where is this confusion of giving a big platform to pro-imperialist, pro-war Libyans coming from?

Let us discuss these issues out in the open. We cannot let the mistakes of April 9th keep us from moving forward. Those mistakes create confusion among the masses that we would like to take a stance against imperialist aggression around the world, and if continued they will indeed promote what imperialist countries are advocating. We must clearly oppose this new era of war and occupation which began in 2001 in Afghanistan, and do our part to counter it by organizing, educating and mobilizing masses with a clear antiwar, anti-occupation platform as the colonial powers continue on this bloody path today, in 2011, against Libya.

We believe these politics, and this proposal for a public discussion, are the way to build a broad, united, and effective antiwar movement.

Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO)

April 14, 2011

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Two examples from an audio transcription of remarks by the organizers:

1- Derrick O'Keefe (Co-chair, Stop-war.ca and CPA)

"We've been working with the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan communities here to build solidarity for their uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. And we did today, we invited the Libyan speakers who we've been in touch with even though there's a difference in opinion about NATO's intervention, we thought it was important for them to have their say. So it was a decision that we made democratically as a coalition. We thank those of you that had a respectful dialogue when there was disagreement and we thank you for listening. Umm, and think it is important, umm and time over time, time will tell that NATO's intervention is not in good faith. And time will tell that NATO's intervention is going to bring more death and destruction to people in Libya who have already suffered so much for so many years."

2- Roger Annis (One of the MC's of the Vancouver, April 9th rally)

"But we're also aware of the fact that there is a significant body of opinion in Libya that we have heard today expressed in what they think is required to do – so we will continue to listen to that point of view, and we will continue to discuss and debate it. We hope to learn from the experiences and the opinions of our Libyan brothers and sisters – we expect that to be a mutual exchange as well. We are living in very very difficult times in Libya and throughout the Middle East. So one thing we can all agree on, and that's why we're here today – is to oppose war, to oppose military intervention, to support people's power, to support the great Arab awakenings of 2010-2011, and with its continuation in the years ahead. To support the right without condition of the people of the Middle East to freely determine their political future and the establishment of democracy."



MAWO In Action
Rally and Petition Drive



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Public Forum

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The Genius of CHÁVEZ



REFLECTIONS BY
FIDEL CASTRO

President Chavez presented his annual report on activities carried out in 2011 and his program for 2012 to the Venezuelan Parliament. After thoroughly carrying out the formalities required by this important activity, he addressed the official state authorities, members of parliament from all parties, and supporters and opposition members who had come to the Assembly to participate in the country's most solemn act.

As usual, the Bolivarian leader was gracious and respectful to all those present. When anyone asked for the floor to make a clarification, he granted it as soon as possible. When one of the members of parliament, who had warmly greeted Chavez as did other opposition members, asked to speak, in a great political gesture Chavez interrupted his report presentation and gave her the floor. What surprised me was the extreme severity of the rebuke, launched against the president with words that really put to test Chavez' chivalry and cold blood. The MPs statement was undoubtedly an insult, although this was not her intention. He alone was capable of calmly responding to the offensive word 'thief' that she had used to judge the president's conduct in terms of the adopted laws and measures.

After verifying the exact term that was used, Chavez responded to the individual challenge for debate with an elegant and sedated phrase, "An eagle does not hunt flies," and without adding another word he calmly proceeded with his report.

It represented an insurmountable test of mental agility and self control. Another woman, of unquestionable humble origins, expressed her astonishment in moving and heartfelt words over what she had just witnessed and the overwhelming majority present broke out in applause. Judging by the sheer volume, the applause seemed to be coming from all of Chavez' friends and many of his adversaries as well.

Chavez' report lasted more than nine hours without the people ever losing interest. Maybe because of that incident, his words were heard by an immeasurable number of people. Many

times I have given extensive speeches on difficult topics, always striving to make the ideas I was transmitting understandable. And I was really at a loss to explain how that soldier of humble origins was able to keep his mind so agile and his incomparable talent to deliver such an address without losing his voice or strength.

To me politics is an extensive and decisive battle of ideas. Publicity is the work of publicists, who perhaps know the techniques to get listeners, spectators and readers to do what they are told to do. If that science, or art, or whatever they call it is employed for the good of human beings, they deserve some respect;



the same respect merited by those who teach people how to think.

Venezuela today is the site of a great battle. Internal and external enemies of the revolution prefer chaos —as Chavez has said— to the just, organized and peaceful development of the country. Being accustomed to analyzing the events that have occurred over more than half a century, and to observing, with greater foundations for judgment, the eventful history of our time and human behavior, one learns to almost predict the future development of events.

To promote a far-reaching Revolution in Venezuela was no easy task. Venezuela is a country full of glorious history, but extraordinarily rich in resources that are of vital importance to the imperialist powers that have, and continue to

map out guidelines in the world.

Political leaders the likes of Romulo Betancourt and Carlos Andres Perez lack the most minimal personal qualities to carry out such a task. Furthermore, Betancourt was excessively vain and hypocritical. He had many opportunities to learn about the situation in Venezuela. As a young man he was a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Costa Rica. He had a strong grasp of Latin American history and the role of imperialism, of poverty rates, and the ruthless plundering of natural resources in South America. He could not ignore that in a vastly rich country such as Venezuela, the majority of the people lived in extreme poverty. The archival footage is irrefutable proof of that reality of life.

As Chavez has explained many times, for more than half a century Venezuela was the world's major oil exporter. At the beginning of the 20th century, European and Yankee warships intervened to support an illegal and tyrannical government that handed the country over to foreign monopolies. It is well known that incalculable funds flowed out of Venezuela to swell the wealth of monopolies and the Venezuelan oligarchy.

I remember when I visited Venezuela for the first time —after the triumph of the Revolution, to give thanks for the support and friendliness afforded to our struggle—, oil was worth barely two dollars a barrel.

Afterwards when I went to Venezuela to take part in the swearing-in ceremony for Chavez, the day he took an oath on the "dying constitution" held by Calderas, oil was worth seven dollars a barrel, despite 40 years having passed since my first visit and almost 30 years since the "distinguished" Richard Nixon had cancelled the direct convertibility of the United States dollar to gold and the US began to buy the world with pieces of paper. For a century, Venezuela was a supplier of cheap fuel to the empire's economy and a net exporter of capital to developed and rich countries.

Why did these repugnant situations dominate for more than a century?

Latin American Armed Forces' officials went to their privileged schools in the United States, where the Olympic champions of democracies



LA GENIALIDAD DE CHÁVEZ

REFLEXIONES DEL
FIDEL CASTRO



El presidente Chávez presentó ante el Parlamento de Venezuela su informe sobre la actividad realizada en 2011 y el programa a ejecutar en el año actual. Después de cumplir rigurosamente las formalidades que demanda esa importante actividad, habló en la Asamblea a las autoridades oficiales del Estado, a los parlamentarios de todos los partidos, y a los simpatizantes y adversarios que el país reúne en su acto más solemne.

El líder bolivariano fue amable y respetuoso



con todos los presentes como es habitual en él. Si alguno le solicitaba el uso de la palabra para alguna aclaración, le concedía de inmediato esa posibilidad. Cuando una parlamentaria, que lo había saludado amablemente igual que otros adversarios, solicitó hablar, interrumpió su informe y le cedió la palabra, en un gesto de gran altura política. Llamó mi atención la dureza extrema con que el Presidente fue increpado con frases que pusieron a prueba su caballería y sangre fría. Aquello constituía una incuestionable ofensa, aunque no fuese la intención de la parlamentaria. Sólo él fue capaz de responder con serenidad al insultante calificativo de "ladrón" que ella utilizó para juzgar la conducta del Presidente por las leyes y medidas adoptadas.

Después de cerciorarse sobre el término exacto empleado, respondió a la solicitud individual de un debate con una frase elegante y sosegada "Águila no caza moscas", y sin añadir una palabra, prosiguió serenamente su exposición.

Fue una prueba insuperable de mente ágil y autocontrol. Otra mujer, de incuestionable estirpe humilde, con emotivas y profundas palabras

expresó el asombro por lo que había visto e hizo estallar el aplauso de la inmensa mayoría allí presente, que por el estampido de los mismos, parecía proceder de todos los amigos y muchos de los adversarios del Presidente.

Más de nueve horas invirtió Chávez en su discurso de rendición de cuentas sin que disminuyera el interés suscitado por sus palabras y, tal vez debido al incidente, fue escuchado por incalculable número de personas. Para mí, que muchas veces abordé arduos problemas en extensos discursos

haciendo siempre el máximo esfuerzo para que las ideas que deseaba transmitir se comprendieran, no alcanzo a explicarme cómo aquel soldado de modesto origen era capaz de mantener con su mente ágil y su inigualable talento tal despliegue oratorio sin perder su voz ni disminuir su fuerza.

La política para mí es el combate amplio y

resuelto de las ideas. La publicidad es tarea de los publicistas, que tal vez conocen las técnicas para hacer que los oyentes, espectadores y lectores hagan lo que se les dice. Si tal ciencia, arte o como le llamen, se empleara para el bien de los seres humanos, merecerían algún respeto; el mismo que merecen quienes enseñan a las personas el hábito de pensar.

En el escenario de Venezuela se libra hoy un gran combate. Los enemigos internos y externos de la revolución prefieren el caos, como afirma Chávez, antes que el desarrollo justo, ordenado y pacífico del país. Acostumbrado a analizar los hechos ocurridos durante más de medio siglo, y de observar cada vez con mayores elementos de juicio la azarosa historia de nuestro tiempo y el comportamiento humano, uno aprende casi a predecir el desarrollo futuro de los acontecimientos.

Promover una Revolución profunda no era tarea fácil en Venezuela, un país de gloriosa historia,

pero inmensamente rico en recursos de vital necesidad para las potencias imperialistas que han trazado y aún trazan pautas en el mundo.

Líderes políticos al estilo de Rómulo Betancourt y Carlos Andrés Pérez, carecían de cualidades personales mínimas para realizar esa tarea. El primero era además, excesivamente vanidoso e hipócrita. Oportunidades tuvo de sobra para conocer la realidad venezolana. En su juventud había sido miembro del Buró Político del Partido Comunista de Costa Rica. Conocía muy bien la historia de América Latina y el papel del imperialismo, los índices de pobreza y el saqueo despiadado de los recursos naturales del continente. No podía ignorar que en un país inmensamente rico como Venezuela, la mayoría del pueblo vivía en extrema pobreza. Los materiales fílmicos están en los archivos y constituyen pruebas irrefutables de aquellas realidades.

Como tantas veces ha explicado Chávez, Venezuela durante más de medio siglo fue el mayor exportador de petróleo en el mundo; buques de guerra europeos y yanquis a principios del siglo XX intervinieron para apoyar un gobierno ilegal y tiránico que entregó el país a los monopolios extranjeros. Es bien conocido que incalculables fondos salieron para engrosar el patrimonio de los monopolios y de la propia oligarquía venezolana.

A mí me basta recordar que cuando visité por primera vez a Venezuela, después del triunfo de la Revolución, para agradecer su simpatía y apoyo a nuestra lucha, el petróleo valía apenas dos dólares el barril.

Cuando viajé después para asistir a la toma de posesión de Chávez, el día que juró sobre la "moribund a Constitución" que sostenía Calderas, el petróleo valía 7 dólares el barril, a pesar de los 40 años



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gave them special courses on maintaining imperialist and bourgeois order. Coups d'état were always welcomed if their objective was to "defend democracies," safeguarding and guaranteeing this repugnant system, in league with the oligarchies. Whether voters knew how to read and write, whether they had homes, employment, medical services and education were unimportant as long as the sacred right to property was maintained. Chavez brilliantly explains this situation. No one knows as well as him what happened in our countries.

Even worse was that the sophisticated nature of weapons, the complex workings and use of modern armaments that require years of learning, the training of highly qualified specialists, and the almost prohibitive cost of such weapons for the weak economies of the continent created a very strong mechanism of subordination and dependence. The US Government, employing mechanisms that did not require prior consultation with the other governments, set guidelines and policies for the military. The most sophisticated techniques of torture were passed on to the so-called security agencies to interrogate those who rebelled against the dirty and repugnant system of hunger and exploitation.

Despite all this, many honest officials, tired of so many indignations, bravely attempted to eradicate that embarrassing treason against the history of our independence struggles.

In Argentina, military official Juan Domingo Peron was able to design an independent and worker-based policy in his country. A bloody military coup overthrew him, expelled him from his country, and kept him in exile from 1955 to 1973. Years later, under the aegis of the Yankees, they once again attacked the government, murdering, torturing and disappearing tens of thousands of Argentines. They were not even able to defend the country during the colonial war that England carried out against Argentina with the conspiratorial support of the United States and henchman Augusto Pinochet with his cohort of fascists officers trained at the School of the Americas.

In Santo Domingo, Colonel Francisco Caamaño Deño; in Peru, General Velazco Alvarado; in Panama, General Omar Torrijos; and in other countries captains and officers who gave their lives anonymously were the antithesis of the traitorous behavior embodied by Somoza, Trujillo, Stroessner and the cruel tyrannies in Uruguay, El Salvador and other countries in Central and South America. The revolutionary military personnel did not expound elaborate theories, nor was this to be expected. They were not academicians educated in political

science, but rather men with a sense of honor who loved their country.

But how far can honest men—who deplore injustice and crime—go along the path of revolution?

Venezuela is an outstanding example of the theoretical and practical role that the military can play in the revolutionary struggle for the independence of our peoples, as they did two centuries ago under the brilliant leadership of Simon Bolivar.

Chavez, a Venezuelan military officer of humble origins, stepped into the political life of Venezuela inspired by the ideas of the Liberator of America. On Bolivar, an inexhaustible source of inspiration, Marti wrote: "he won sublime battles with soldiers barefoot and half naked [...] who never fought so much, nor fought better, in the world for freedom ..."

"... Of Bolivar, he said, you can talk only after climbing up a mountain to use it as a platform [...] or after freeing a bunch of peoples united in one fist ..."

"... what he did not do, still remains undone today, because Bolivar still has things to do in the Americas."

More than half a century later the famous, award-winning poet Pablo Neruda wrote a poem on Bolivar which Chavez frequently quotes. The final stanza reads:

"I met Bolivar one long morning, in Madrid, at the head of the Fifth Regiment, Father, I said, you are or not or who you are? And looking at the Mountain Headquarters, he said:

'I wake up every hundred years when the people awaken.'"

But the Bolivarian leader is not limited to theoretical elaborations. His concrete measures are implemented without hesitation. The English-speaking Caribbean countries, which have to contend with modern and luxurious Yankee cruise ships for the right to receive tourists in their hotels, restaurants and recreation centers, quite often foreign-owned, but at least they generate employment, will always welcome fuel from Venezuela, supplied by that country with special payment facilities, when the barrel reached prices that sometimes exceeded US \$100.

In the tiny state of Nicaragua, the land of Sandino, the "General of Free Men", the Central Intelligence Agency organized the exchange of guns for drugs through Luis Posada Carriles after he was rescued from a Venezuelan prison. This operation resulted in

thousands of deaths and mutilations among that heroic people. Nicaragua has also received the solidarity support of Venezuela. These are unprecedented examples in the history of this hemisphere.

The ruinous Free Trade Agreement that the Yankees intend to impose on Latin America, as they did with Mexico, would turn Latin America and the Caribbean not only into the region with the world's worst distribution of wealth, which already is. It will turn it into a huge market where corn and other staple foods that are traditional sources of plant and animal protein would be displaced by subsidized U.S. crops, as is already happening in Mexico.

Used cars and other goods are displacing Mexican industry manufactures; job opportunities are decreasing in both cities and the countryside; the drug and arms trades are escalating, growing numbers of youngsters aged 14 or 15 years are turned into fearsome criminals. Never before, buses or other vehicles full of people who even paid to be transported across the border in search of employment, have been kidnapped and mass murdered. Known figures grow from year to year. More than ten thousand people are now losing their lives each year.

It is impossible to analyze the Bolivarian Revolution without taking these realities into account.

The armed forces, in such social circumstances, are forced into endless and wearisome wars.

Honduras is not an industrialized, financial or

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transcurridos desde la primera visita y casi 30 desde que el “benemérito” Richard Nixon había declarado que el canje metálico del dólar dejaba de existir y Estados Unidos comenzó a comprar el mundo con papeles. Durante un siglo la nación fue suministradora de combustible barato a la economía del imperio y exportadora neta de capital a los países desarrollados y ricos.

¿Por qué predominaron durante más de un siglo estas repugnantes realidades?

Los oficiales de las Fuerzas Armadas de América Latina tenían sus escuelas privilegiadas en Estados Unidos, donde los campeones olímpicos de las democracias los educaban en cursos especiales destinados a preservar el orden imperialista y burgués. Los golpes de Estado serían bienvenidos siempre que estuvieran destinados a “defender las democracias”, preservar y garantizar tan repugnante orden, en alianza con las oligarquías; si los electores sabían o no leer y escribir, si tenían o no viviendas, empleo, servicios médicos y educación, eso carecía de importancia siempre que el sagrado derecho a la propiedad fuese sostenido. Chávez explica esas realidades magistralmente. Nadie conoce como él lo que ocurría en nuestros países.

Lo que era todavía peor, el carácter sofisticado de las armas, la complejidad en la explotación y el uso del armamento moderno que requiere años de aprendizaje, y la formación de especialistas altamente calificados, el precio casi inaccesible de las mismas para las economías débiles del continente, creaba un mecanismo superior de subordinación y dependencia. El Gobierno de Estados Unidos a través de mecanismos que ni siquiera consultan a los gobiernos, traza pautas y determina políticas para los militares. Las técnicas más sofisticadas de torturas se transmitían a los llamados cuerpos de seguridad para interrogar a los que se rebelaban contra el inmundio y repugnante sistema de hambre y explotación.

A pesar de eso, no pocos oficiales honestos, hastiados por tantas desvergüenzas, intentaron valientemente erradicar aquella bochornosa traición a la historia de nuestras luchas por la independencia.

En Argentina, Juan Domingo Perón, oficial del Ejército, fue capaz de diseñar una política independiente y de raíz obrera en su país. Un sangriento golpe militar lo derrocó, lo expulsó de su país, y lo mantuvo exiliado desde 1955 hasta 1973. Años más tarde, bajo la égida de los yanquis, asaltaron de nuevo el poder, asesinaron, torturaron y desaparecieron a decenas de miles de argentinos, y no fueron siquiera capaces de defender el país en la guerra colonial contra Argentina que Inglaterra llevó a cabo con el apoyo cómplice de Estados Unidos y el esbirro Augusto Pinochet, con su cohorte de oficiales fascistas formados en la Escuela de las Américas.

En Santo Domingo, el Coronel Francisco

Caamaño Deñó; en Perú, el General Velasco Alvarado; en Panamá, el General Omar Torrijos; y en otros países capitanes y oficiales que sacrificaron sus vidas anónimamente, fueron las antítesis de las conductas traidoras personificadas en Somoza, Trujillo, Stroessner y las sanguinarias tiranías de Uruguay, El Salvador y otros países de Centro y Sur América. Los militares revolucionarios no expresaban puntos de vista teóricamente elaborados en detalles, y nadie tenía derecho a exigirlos, porque no eran académicos educados en política, sino hombres con sentido del honor que amaban su país.

Sin embargo, hay que ver hasta donde son



capaces de llegar por los senderos de la revolución hombres de tendencia honesta, que repudian la injusticia y el crimen.

Venezuela constituye un brillante ejemplo del rol teórico y práctico que los militares revolucionarios pueden desempeñar en la lucha por la independencia de nuestros pueblos, como ya lo hicieron hace dos siglos bajo la genial dirección de Simón Bolívar.

Chávez, un militar venezolano de humilde origen, irrumpe en la vida política de Venezuela inspirado en las ideas del libertador de América. Sobre Bolívar, fuente inagotable de inspiración, Martí escribió: “ganó batallas sublimes con soldados descalzos y medio desnudos [] jamás se peleó tanto, ni se peleó mejor, en el mundo por la libertad...”

“... de Bolívar -dijo- se puede hablar con una montaña por tribuna [...] o con un manojo de pueblos libres en el puño...”

“... lo que él no dejó hecho, sin hacer está hasta hoy; porque Bolívar tiene que hacer en América todavía.”

Más de medio siglo después el insigne y laureado poeta Pablo Neruda escribió sobre Bolívar un poema que Chávez repite con frecuencia. En su estrofa final expresa:

“Yo conocí a Bolívar una mañana larga,
en Madrid, en la boca del Quinto Regimiento,
Padre, le dije, eres o no eres o quién eres?

Y mirando el Cuartel de la Montaña, dijo:

‘Despierto cada cien años cuando despierta el pueblo’.”

Pero el líder bolivariano no se limita a la elaboración teórica. Sus medidas concretas no se hacen esperar. Los países caribeños de habla inglesa, a los que modernos y lujosos buques cruceros yanquis le disputaban el derecho a recibir turistas en sus hoteles, restaurantes y centros de recreación, no pocas veces de propiedad extranjera pero que al menos generaban empleo, agradecerán siempre a Venezuela el combustible suministrado por ese país con facilidades especiales de pago, cuando el barril alcanzó precios que a veces superaban los 100 dólares.

El pequeño Estado de Nicaragua, patria de Sandino, “General de Hombres Libres”, donde la Agencia Central de Inteligencia a través de Luis Posada Carriles, después de ser rescatado de una prisión venezolana, organizó el intercambio de armas por drogas que costó miles de vidas y mutilados a ese heroico pueblo, también ha recibido el apoyo solidario de Venezuela. Son ejemplos sin precedentes en la historia de este hemisferio.

El ruinoso Acuerdo de Libre Comercio que los yanquis pretenden imponer a la América Latina, como hizo con México, convertiría los países latinoamericanos y

caribeños no solo en la región del mundo donde peor está distribuida la riqueza, que ya lo es, sino también en un gigantesco mercado donde hasta el maíz y otros alimentos que son fuentes históricas de proteína vegetal y animal serían desplazados por los cultivos subsidiados de Estados Unidos, como ya está ocurriendo en territorio mexicano.

Los automóviles de uso y otros bienes desplazan a los de la industria mexicana; tanto las ciudades como los campos pierden su capacidad de empleo, el comercio de drogas y armas crece, jóvenes casi adolescentes con apenas 14 ó 15 años, en número creciente, son convertidos en temibles delincuentes. Jamás se vio que ómnibus u otros vehículos repletos de personas, que incluso pagaron para ser transportados al otro lado de la

commercial country, or even a major producer of drugs. However, some of its cities break the record of drug-related violent deaths. There instead stands the banner of a major base of the strategic forces of the United States Southern Command. What is happening there, and is already happening in more than one Latin American country, is the Dantesque picture painted above, from which some countries have begun to escape. Among them and first, Venezuela, not just because it has considerable natural resources, but because it has been rescued from the insatiable greed of foreign corporations and has sparked considerable political and social forces capable of great



achievements. Venezuela today is quite another from that I went to only 12 years ago, which had already deeply impressed me, seeing it as a Phoenix rising again from the ashes of its history.

Mentioning the mysterious computer of Raul Reyes, in the hands of the U.S. and the CIA after the attack organized and supplied by them in full Ecuadorian territory, which killed Marulanda's replacement as well as several unarmed American youths, a version has been released that Chávez supported the "narco-terrorist organization FARC." The true terrorists and drug traffickers in Colombia are the paramilitaries that supplied drugs to American dealers to sell them in the largest drug market in the world: the United States.

I never spoke with Marulanda, but I did speak with honored writers and intellectuals who came to know him well. I discussed his thoughts and history. He was undoubtedly a brave and revolutionary man, which I do not hesitate to affirm. I explained that I did not agree with him on his tactics. In my view, two or three thousand men would have been more than enough to defeat a conventional army in

the territory of Colombia. His mistake was to devise a revolutionary army with almost as many soldiers as the enemy. That was extremely expensive.

Today, technology has changed many aspects of war; the forms of struggle also change. In fact, the clash of conventional forces between powers possessing nuclear weapons has become impossible. We do not have to have the knowledge of Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking and thousands of other scientists to understand that. It is a latent danger and the result is known or should be known. Thinking beings could take millions of years to repopulate the planet.

Nevertheless, I hold the duty to fight, which

in itself is something innate in man, to find solutions that will enable a more reasoned and dignified existence.

Since I met Chavez, now as president of Venezuela, from the final stages of the Pastrana administration, I always saw him interested in promoting peace in Colombia. He facilitated meetings between the Colombian government and the revolutionaries that took place in Cuba, note well, on the basis of reaching a true peace agreement and not a surrender.

I do not recall ever having heard Chavez promote anything but peace in Colombia, nor mention Raul Reyes. We always addressed other issues. He particularly appreciates the Colombians, millions of them live in Venezuela and everyone benefits from the social measures taken by the Revolution, and the people of Colombia appreciate that almost as much as those of Venezuela.

I wish to express my solidarity and appreciation to General Henry Rangel Silva, Head of Strategic Operational Command of the Armed Forces, and newly appointed Minister of Defense of the Bolivarian Republic. I had

the honor of meeting him when he visited Chavez in Cuba a few months ago. I could see in him an intelligent, well-meant, capable, and yet modest man. I heard his calm, brave and clear speech, which inspired confidence.

He led the organization of the most perfect parade of a Latin American military force that I have ever seen. We hope it will serve as encouragement and example to other brother armies.

The Yankees had nothing to do with that parade, and would not be able to do better.

It is extremely unfair to criticize Chavez for the resources invested in the excellent weapons which were displayed there. I'm sure they will never be used to attack a neighboring country. The weapons, resources and knowledge must go along the paths of unity to see America, as The Liberator dreamed, "... the greatest nation in the world, greatest not so much by virtue of her area and wealth as by her freedom and glory."

Everything unites us more than Europe or the United States itself, except the lack of independence imposed on us for 200 years.

Fidel Castro Ruz
January 25, 2012

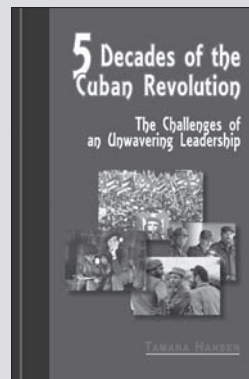
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5 Decades of the Cuban Revolution *The Challenges of an Unwavering Leadership*

By Tamara Hansen

"The battles Cuba has fought have not been easy. Some were physical battles, such as the battle against bandits in the Escambray Mountains or the Bay of Pigs invasion. However, most were not battles of physical might, but battles of ideas. But with every twist and turn, every up and down Fidel has been one of the first leaders to say, 'this way forward' or 'we made a wrong turn, we must change course.'"

Tamara Hansen is the coordinator of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC). She is also an editorial board member of The Fire This Time newspaper. She has travelled to Cuba ten times and has written extensively on Cuban politics since 2003.



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frontera en busca de empleo, fuesen secuestrados y eliminados masivamente. Las cifras conocidas crecen de año en año. Más de 10 mil personas están perdiendo ya la vida cada año.

No es posible analizar la Revolución Bolivariana sin tomar en cuenta estas realidades.

Las fuerzas armadas, en tales circunstancias sociales, se ven forzadas a interminables y desgastadoras guerras.

Honduras no es un país industrializado, financiero o comercial, ni siquiera gran productor de drogas, sin embargo algunas de sus ciudades rompen el record de muertos por violencia a causa de las drogas. Allí se yergue en cambio el estandarte de una importante base de las fuerzas estratégicas del Comando Sur de Estados Uni-

historia. Era sin dudas un hombre valiente y revolucionario, lo cual no vacilo en afirmar. Expliqué que no coincidía con él en su concepción táctica. A mi juicio, dos o tres mil hombres habrían sido más que suficientes para derrotar en el territorio de Colombia a un ejército regular convencional. Su error era concebir un ejército revolucionario armado con casi tantos soldados como el adversario. Eso era sumamente costoso y virtualmente imposible de manejar.

Hoy la tecnología ha cambiado muchos aspectos de la guerra; las formas de lucha también cambian. De hecho el enfrentamiento de las fuerzas convencionales, entre potencias que poseen el arma nuclear, se ha tornado imposible. No hay que poseer los conocimientos de Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking y miles de otros científicos para comprenderlo. Es un peligro latente y el resultado se conoce o se debiera conocer. Los

seres pensantes podrían tardar millones de años en volver a poblar el planeta.

A pesar de todo, sostengo el deber de luchar, que es algo de por sí innato en el hombre, buscar soluciones que le permitan una existencia más razonada y digna.

Desde que conocí a Chávez, ya en la presiden-

cia de Venezuela, desde la etapa final del gobierno de Pastrana, siempre lo vi interesado por la paz en Colombia, y facilitó las reuniones entre el gobierno y los revolucionarios colombianos que tuvieron por sede a Cuba, entiéndase bien, para un acuerdo verdadero de paz y no una rendición.

No recuerdo haber escuchado nunca a Chávez promover en Colombia otra cosa que no fuera la paz, ni tampoco mencionar a Raúl Reyes. Siempre abordábamos otros temas. Él aprecia particularmente a los colombianos; millones de ellos viven en Venezuela y todos se benefician con las medidas sociales adoptadas por la Revolución, y el pueblo de Colombia lo aprecia casi tanto como el de Venezuela.

Deseo expresar mi solidaridad y estima al General Henry Rangel Silva, Jefe del Comando Estratégico Operacional de las Fuerzas Armadas, y recién designado Ministro para la Defensa de la República Bolivariana. Tuve el honor de conocerlo cuando en meses ya distantes visitó a Chávez en Cuba. Pude apreciar en él un hombre inteligente y sano, capaz y a la vez modesto. Escuché su discurso sereno, valiente y claro, que inspiraba confianza.

Dirigió la organización del desfile militar más perfecto que he visto de una fuerza militar

latinoamericana, que esperamos sirva de aliento y ejemplo a otros ejércitos hermanos.

Los yanquis nada tienen que ver con ese desfile y no serían capaces de hacerlo mejor.

Es sumamente injusto criticar a Chávez por los recursos invertidos en las excelentes armas que allí se exhibieron. Estoy seguro de que jamás se utilizarán para agredir a un país hermano. Las armas, los recursos y los conocimientos deberán marchar por los senderos de la unidad para formar en América, como soñó El Libertador, "... la más grande nación del mundo, menos por su extensión y riqueza que por su libertad y gloria".

Todo nos une más que a Europa o a los propios Estados Unidos, excepto la falta de independencia que nos han impuesto durante 200 años.



Fidel Castro Ruz

Enero 25 de 2012



dos. Lo que allí ocurre y está ocurriendo ya en más de un país latinoamericano es el dantesco cuadro señalado, de los cuales algunos países, han comenzado a salir. Entre ellos, y en primer lugar Venezuela, pero no solo porque posee cuantiosos recursos naturales, sino porque los rescató de la avaricia insaciable de las transnacionales extranjeras y ha desatado considerables fuerzas políticas y sociales capaces de alcanzar grandes logros. La Venezuela de hoy es otra muy distinta a la que conocí hace solo 12 años, y ya entonces me impresionó profundamente, al ver que como ave Fénix resurgía de sus históricas cenizas.

Aludiendo a la misteriosa computadora de Raúl Reyes, en manos de Estados Unidos y la CIA, a partir del ataque organizado y suministrado por ellos en pleno territorio ecuatoriano, que asesinó al sustituto de Marulanda y a varios jóvenes latinoamericanos desarmados, han lanzado la versión de que Chávez apoyaba la "organización narco-terrorista de las FARC". Los verdaderos terroristas y narcotraficantes en Colombia han sido los paramilitares que le suministraban a los traficantes norteamericanos las drogas, que se venden en el mayor mercado de estupefacientes del mundo: Estados Unidos.

Nunca hablé con Marulanda, pero sí con escritores e intelectuales honrados que llegaron a conocerlo bien. Analicé sus pensamientos e

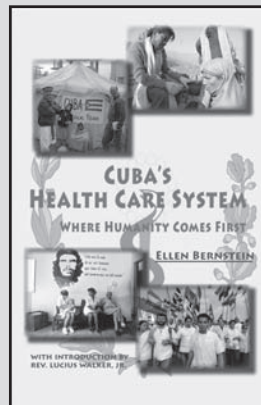
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CUBA'S HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WHERE HUMANITY COMES FIRST

BY ELLEN BERNSTEIN

"The unfailing dedication of Cuban health care professionals has led to dramatic improvements in quality of life, for millions of people who previously had no other hope of receiving decent medical care. IFCO/Pastors for Peace is pleased to honor the diligent health care professionals of the Cuban health care system. We especially pay tribute to Cuba's national leadership, whose vision of universal health care as a right of every citizen sets an example for the world."

Ellen Bernstein has served as Associate Director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) since 2003. She has been a key staff member of IFCO's project Pastors for Peace, and has been deeply and integrally involved in IFCO's historic work with Cuba.



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Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) is an organization working to build solidarity and support for Cuba in Vancouver, Canada and internationally. To do this, we organize frequent educational events, cultural events, conferences, mobilizations and actions in support of Cuba's sovereignty against Imperialist attacks and in defence of the gains of the Cuban revolution.

We also support campaigns:

- 1- Against the US Blockade on Cuba
- 2- To Free the Cuban 5 held in US Jails
- 3- To Extradite anti-Cuban Terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela

Throughout the lower mainland, at events, actions, festivals, high schools and campuses, we engage with thousands of people about Cuba. Our work aims to bring Cuba, as a country making important social gains, to youth, students, women, Latin American people, people of the third world and other working and oppressed people in Canada, as an example of building a better world.

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By Ali Yerevani

Once again the United States and its western allies like the Britain, France and Canada are about to create another bloodbath in the Middle East, as they prepare for war and destruction against another Middle East country. Iran is an independent sovereign country, whose people have stood up for more than three decades against aggression and intimidation including all kinds of sanctions, war, sabotage and terror on the people of Iran by the US and its allies. The Iranian people have been targeted simply for exercising their inalienable right to self-determination.

Iran is the central target of the US in the Middle East and North Africa. Without bringing Iran to its knees it will not be possible for the US to roll back the dynamism of growing anti-colonial sentiment in the whole region from North Africa to the Middle East and South Asia. In the last thirty-three years, and especially in the current time, the United States' fundamental goal has been for regime change in Iran. Today the US is trying to sell this plot to the whole world, and particularly to Muslim people of the region, as if this is the continuation of the mass movements and uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. Western powers are trying to shape public opinion and convincing people that regime change in Iran has the same nature of overthrowing puppets like Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Mubarak in Egypt. Iran's

WHY IS THE U.S. PREPARING FOR WAR WITH IRAN?



clear stand against the Zionist regime of Israel, its strong support of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, its support of liberation movements against colonial domination, actively opposing unfair political and economical policies imposed by western powers, seeking alliance with "rouge" states including Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia for mutual interest and development, and finally displaying a very diverse range of industrial and scientific developments independently from the assistance of western powers has made Iran a power house not only in the Middle East and North Africa but in poor and developing countries around the world.

With Iran as it is, a powerful country in the Middle East, with an undeniable influence in the region and beyond, United States is unable to bring back her total hegemony to the Middle East like it was before the great Iranian revolution of 1979, when Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a US puppet ruled Iran. The Iranian revolution changed the relationship and balance of forces, if not completely, indeed significantly enough, in favour of oppressed and working people of the Muslim world from the Middle East and South Asia, to East, West and North Africa. With growing anti-colonial awareness among working and oppressed masses, the US has turned Muslims into terrorists and Iran into a factory creating this new "devilish" brand. So it started the foundation of a new racist cold war, with Muslims as a target and Islam as an ideology of "Terror." The systematic demonizing of

Islam and Muslims established a racist Islamophobic hysteria as an amalgamated solid political and social reactionary institution in the entire western world. Yet with a growing resistance to this unjust and unfair characterization, as well as protesting to the broad attack on democratic and human rights of people with Islamic faith, colonial powers are indeed worried about the defeat of their vicious and inhuman campaign. However, with the deepening of financial, economical and market crisis, western powers decided to accelerate their attack on oppressed people world-wide with direct military attack and occupation.

The tragic incident in New York on September 11, 2001 gave a golden opportunity to implement the strategic plan with the aim of taking down politically independent governments in the Middle East as well as East and North Africa with their eyes ultimately on the most powerful of such governments, Iran. The military intervention and occupation of Afghanistan in October 2001, and Iraq in 2003, if not for all other political, economical and strategic reasons, in final analysis, was a probe to settle their account with Iran. In retrospective, their political and military campaign has created deeper resentment and rejection of western colonial powers in the entire Muslim world. Hence, the Islamic Republic of Iran has more than ever maintained itself as the ultimate target of this process. Western powers, simply and absolutely cannot restore their plundering powers and hegemony in the Middle East without taking out Iran. This is a very chilling and concrete truth.

Today the message of the Iranian people to all colonial, semi-colonial and developing nations of the world is much more

powerful than anytime before. This message has become an incurable headache for the US and her allies. If thirty years ago the point of Iranian people to the world was that it is possible to overthrow western domination and get rid of puppet regimes; today the message is that countries under all kinds of domination of western powers can advance independently in all practical and theoretical fields of economy and science without being puppets. This is what is frightening the west the most: that they are not needed for the development and prosperity of developing nations. There is no reason to compromise our dignity and sovereignty or to beg for development and advancement. This growing inspiration and independence is not what these powers projected for the 21st century.

In order for the US to be able to conduct a bloody war against Iran, they must manipulate and shape public opinion in the US and around the world. The ugly and completely deceptive campaign against Iran has moved from a hideous campaign to a tragicomedy. For decades the west filled our ears with how important and decisive it is to fight Iran, as the so-called centre of training and exporting terrorists. Further they put Iran with North Korea and Iraq in an "Axis of Evil". For

a decade now they have been drumming up fear about the danger of Iran's peaceful nuclear activities. Ignoring that even if Iran somehow obtained an atomic bomb, how could they possibly use it against the 300 Israeli and thousands of American nuclear warheads - considering their sophisticated nuclear defence technology? However, apparently these manipulations are not enough, now we have very recently learned from Mr. Panetta, the US Secretary of Defence, that the United States is under threat of attack from Iran! In fact they are reminding us that it is not the US, who is threatening Iran, but Iran that is threatening US! In other words, the victimizer is trying to paint itself as the victim and

turning the victim into a menace. Ironically and hypocritically, Israel is warning other countries of the region and the whole world about the dangers of Iran, but is not a signer of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This undeniable fact does not seem to matter to any of its strong supporters in the west. The rational question here is, shouldn't the world be more concerned about a heavily nuclear-armed Israel, which has established itself as an aggressor and war monger against Palestinian and Arab countries for more than 6 decades, than Iran, who does not have one record of

that regime, in this case namely Iran, but to oppose an immanent imperialist war drive against Iran. Like their campaigns against Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, as well as Syria, the US policy of "regime change" can only bring devastation to the people of oppressed nations. To call for a dictatorial regime to be condemned or for regime change in Iran, from outside that country, is against the principal of self-determination of sovereign nations. Self-determination means it is up to the Iranian people to decide how to conduct their internal affairs, including the form of government and social order. For those who are, out of naivety or desperation, focusing their campaign against the government of Iran- we must remind them that true regime change from outside of Iran is only possible through imperialist military intervention, period. Therefore no matter what nice words they use against sanctions and military intervention, as soon as they are distracted from the main focus against foreign intervention, and begin talking about regime change, they are willingly or unwillingly on the same side as the imperialist campaign for the destruction of Iran.

Iran is not a threat to anyone. Iran is simply

the target of imperialist powers because of its independence, geographical importance and political weight and influence in the whole region and beyond. Iran is surrounded by dozens of US military bases, all for their preparations to attack Iran. We must demand unconditionally that the US, UN Security Council, and EU end their sanctions on Iran. Stop assassinations of Iranian scientists and stop intervention in Iran. We must demand that the US, NATO and all imperialists out of the Middle East and North Africa and as well as an immediate end to the occupation of Afghanistan, Iraq and ending of interference in Pakistan, Libya and Syria.



aggression against any country in the world?

We need to realize by now that the US and other imperial countries' ugly and untruthful campaign against Iran, is precisely the same as their world wide racist campaign of Islamophobia. It is all about domination and imperialist hegemony for the elimination of all resistance against imperialism that is gaining popularity in countries with Muslim populations. We have to be vigilant about imperialist tricks and manipulations while we are fighting back against war mongers. The focus today is not the nature of this or

By Janine Solanki, Thomas Davies & Shakeel Lochan

Since the triumph of Cuba's 1959 revolution to today, the vision and political ideas that shape the Cuban revolution remain a source of inspiration, discussion and debate around the world. Through the ideas of Fidel, Che, the Cuban socialist project, and the dynamics of the mass revolutionary movement, Cuba has become a country renowned for its achievements in health, education, culture, science and many other aspects of social and human progress. The Cuban socialist project and the Cuban revolutionary leadership, despite 50 years of an inhuman and criminal blockade by consecutive US administrations, have never wavered to imperialist pressure.

The annual International Che Guevara Conference is an opportunity to discuss and debate the ideas of the Cuban revolution, its dynamism and how it has impacted Latin America and the world.

We in Fire This Time newspaper believe that the Che Guevara Conference is an important annual event and present the report back from November 2011.



CHE GUEVARA CONFERENCE 2011

IN VANCOUVER A HUGE SUCCESS!



For the 4th consecutive year, the Vancouver International Che Guevara Conference took center stage to discuss the theme, "Cuba Today: The Gains and Challenges." The conference was a great success, bringing together over 500 people to participate in 26 packed hours of workshops, discussions, films and cultural presentations hosted by 17 distinguished presenters from Cuba, Venezuela, and across North America. The conference is organized by Vancouver Communities in Solidarity Cuba (VCSC).

DAY 1 The conference opened with a welcoming by Coast Salish Elder Kelly White, who presented Aleida Guevara with a handmade star blanket, a symbol of protection and respect to welcome the Cuban revolutionary to her territory. VCSC Executive Committee member Colleen Glynn gave a conference opening and presented a special greeting from Cuban Ambassador to Canada, the Honourable Mrs. Teresita Vicenti Sotolongo.

Throughout the conference, the diversity of participants was apparent. Looking around the hall, you could see youths of 15 years to elders in their 80's, representing a wide variety of nationalities and ethnicities, and members of many different communities. Participating in the conference were members of arts and cultural communities and the LGBTQ community, and a wide range of ethnic and religious communities, including the Muslim community, Indigenous, Latin American, African, Middle Eastern, and so on.

This broad and inclusive environment brought everyone together under the banner of discussion and debate on "Cuba Today."

Dr. Aleida Guevara, a Cuban revolutionary leader, prominent author, pediatrician, and daughter of legendary revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, joined the conference for the second consecutive year to present a much-anticipated workshop titled "World Crisis, Imperialist Offensive and Our Alternatives." She emphasized that the fight Che Guevara led to confront imperialism in every corner of the world remains the central challenge in today's fight for a better world. Dr. Guevara's rousing talk was followed by the documentary film, "The Uncompromising Revolution" by renowned filmmaker Saul Landau.

Participants then had the privilege of taking part in two workshops by two lifelong Cuban revolutionaries. Mrs. Maria De La Luz B'hamel, the Minister Councillor of the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa presented on the topic of "Cuba's Gains, Challenges and Evolving Socialism." She was followed by Manuel Yepe, who worked directly with Che Guevara before and after the Cuban Revolution, and is currently a journalist and professor at the Superior Institute of International Relations of Havana. Professor Yepe presented the innovative workshop, "Cuban Reform VS. Chinese Reform: What We Can Learn."

Throughout the day participants also had the chance to reflect on the different Cuban photo and art exhibits on display, and also read from the

world's perhaps largest ever printing of "Socialism and Man in Cuba". This impressive 5 by 10 feet banner was visible from everywhere in the hall, and between workshops VCSC organizer Azza read aloud selected quotations from this, Che Guevara's most fundamental writing.

Nelson P. Valdes, renowned Cuban-American intellectual and Emeritus Professor at the University of New Mexico, closed the first day with the workshop, "Cuban Foreign Policy Against U.S. Foreign Policy: Revolution and Counter-revolution in Our Backyard". With over 50 years of experience on the subject, Professor Valdes really illustrated the vicious and continuous battle the U.S. has waged against Cuba and the "threat" of its good example.

To close the first day, Colleen Glynn returned to the stage with VCSC coordinator Tamara Hansen, who concluded by saying, "This conference is part of what Fidel calls the Battle of Ideas – where we have been able to discuss and debate not only the Cuban Revolution, but most importantly how learning from Cuba's example is necessary in our struggle for a better world."

DAY 2 The hall filled quickly on the 2nd day of the conference with participants from the previous day alongside new faces. To start out the day, the conference was greeted by the new Consul General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in Vancouver, Mrs. Merli Vanegas, who spoke of the Bolivarian and Cuban Revolutions as fundamentally linked in the past, present and future.

The workshop "Fidel, Cuba and the Imperialist

Attack on Libya” discussed a critical issue in today’s world, and Cuba’s principled stand for the self-determination of oppressed nations. The workshop was presented by Tamara Hansen, VCSC coordinator and author of “5 Decades of the Cuban Revolution: The Challenges of an Unwavering Leadership”, alongside Aaron Mercredi, editorial board member of the Fire This Time Newspaper and organizer with the Indigenous Rights and Action Project (IRAP).

The advancements of women within the Cuban Revolution, which Fidel called the “revolution within a revolution”, were explored by Moon Vasquez, Cindy Domingo, and Michelle Clark, three Seattle organizers of the U.S. Women and Cuba Collaboration. They screened the documentary film “Maestra,” about the successful women-led campaign to eradicate illiteracy in Cuban directly after the Revolution.

Evergreen State College Professor Larry Mosqueda received a standing ovation for his thorough and thoughtful analysis of “Why Che’s Ideas are Fundamental for Our Struggle Today,” while Cuba’s achievements in the “agricultural revolution” were then highlighted by UBC Professor and Canada-Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project organizer Wendy Holm in her workshop, “Sustainability and Cooperatives in Cuba’s Future.”

Professor Nelson Valdes returned for the dynamic and interactive, “60 Minutes with Nelson Valdes: All the questions you were afraid to ask about Cuba,” in which everything from Cuban folklore to the rights of the LGBTQ community were up for discussion.

The conference would not have been complete without the return of Aleida Guevara for the final workshop, “Che and the Cuban Revolution”. Given the previous presentations and discussions on Che’s ideas, Aleida chose to focus on Che’s role as a revolutionary doctor, and to field a wide variety of questions about both her and her father’s revolutionary work and ideas. Aleida also shared both touching and humorous personal stories about her father’s life and work, as well as treated the audience to a her beautiful rendition of a Cuban song about Che Guevara. All of the presenters for the previous

two days joined each other on stage to close the 2nd day of the conference and the hall was filled with chants of, “Viva Cuba!” “Viva Che!” “Venceremos - We will win!” as the presenters



Conference Workshop Featuring Doctor Aleida Guevara

received a standing ovation. The hall was as full to close the workshop portion of the conference as it had been during the opening. Hundreds of diverse and engaged participants had listened to many presentations, shared and debated their own ideas, and become part of the proof found in the conference. The proof that Che’s ideas and the Cuban Revolution remain just as important today as they were 50 years ago.

DAY 3 The next day was a special cultural event in honour of the Cuban 5 heroes held in U.S. jails. An impressive and wide ranging group of artists shared their talents in the name of freedom and justice for these five Cuban men, who for 12 years have been unjustly held in U.S. jails for investigating and exposing U.S. backed terrorist groups which carry out attacks against Cuba.

The event began with the new documentary film “Will the Real Terrorist Please Stand Up?” by Saul Landau, which exposes the history of US backed terrorism against Cuba and makes a strong case for the freedom of

the Cuban 5.

Artists such as Sangre Morena, Joaquin Ernesto and MX Catracho sang songs of love and revolution. Local poets Dilia Ochoa and Shakeel Lochan shared the stage and their hearts alongside Seattle based poet Hap Brocki, and Vancouver hip-hop artists and recent participants in the 2011 Cuban HipHop Symposium Joose Justis and Attikus brought new rhymes and energy into the fight for the freedom of the Cuban 5.

The event also featured an exhibition of artwork by Gerardo Hernandez, one of the Cuban 5, which showed both his sense of humour and determination in both the fight for the freedom of the Cuban 5, and also in defense of his beloved homeland.

Alicia Jrapko, Coordinator of the International Committee to Free the Cuba 5 gave greeting from San Francisco, and lawyer and former Vancouver City Councillor Tim Louis was presented with a special award for his consistent campaigning for the freedom of the Cuban 5, by Marilu B’Hamel from the Cuban Embassy and VCSC Coordinator Tamara Hansen.

One of the most touching moments of the program was Aleida Guevara’s reading of a moving message and poem dedication to Che, which she received from Antonio Guerrero, one of the Cuban 5, written specially for the conference.

Ali Yerevani, political editor of both the Battle of Ideas Press and of the Fire This Time Newspaper

gave the conference assessment and closing. After almost 26 hours of conference program, Ali emphasized that the fight to defend Cuba cannot be separated from the fight for a better world, and that this fight began long before 1959 and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. He invited everyone to get involved in this struggle and consider an important quotation of Che’s when confronting the world’s challenges including the fight for the Cuban Five, “We are realists, we dream the impossible.”

The cultural event closed with the singing of a song dedicated to the Cuban 5 written and performed by members of VCSC and the Free the Cuban 5 Committee – Vancouver.

A cultural event dedicated to the Cuban 5 heroes was a fitting end to the 4th Annual Vancouver International Che Guevara Conference, as these five men are living proof that the Che’s example lives on, as does the fight for a better world.



Conference Workshop Featuring: Manuel Yepe



Conference Workshop Featuring Nelson Valdes

By Alison Bodine

This May, the world's imperialist military powers are descending upon Chicago. During the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Summit from May 20-21, 2012, leaders from the 28 NATO-member countries are meeting to discuss the best ways to implement policies of further wars and occupations against oppressed people all over the world. But, the NATO meeting will not pass

This 63-year history of attacks on oppressed people is the reason that people from the US and around the world are uniting to protest at the NATO Summit. Protests against NATO will take many forms; from street demonstrations to forums and discussions. The main actions are being organized by the Coalition Against NATO/G8 War and Poverty Agenda (CANG8), an ad-hoc coalition that first came together in August 2011. At the first CANG8 meeting in Chicago, representatives from over 80 US and Interna-

that the G8 Summit (a meeting of representatives from the eight biggest economies in the world) would be moving out of Chicago. The G8 Summit will instead take place at Camp David, a remote location where it will be harder to organize protests against their agenda of poverty and austerity.

The weekend before the NATO Summit begins, CANG8 is organizing a People's Summit with two full days of workshops and plenaries that will focus not only on the devastation caused by

NO to NATO! NO to War!

Protest the NATO Summit in Chicago May 2012

in silence as people from Chicago, all over the US, and around the world gather in protest of the death and destruction caused by this war machine.

To better understand the purpose of the meeting in Chicago, it is important to know more about the history of NATO. It was formed in 1949 as a strategic alliance between North America and Europe against the growing power of the Soviet Union. Since then, it has grown into a powerful military tool that spearheaded bombing campaigns in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) and Yugoslavia (1999). When the new era of war and occupation began with the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, NATO, with the US as its most powerful member, became a leader in the so-called "war against terrorism" and has led the complete destruction of two countries: Afghanistan and Libya.

In Afghanistan, NATO member countries have contributed a great majority of troops, military equipment and supplies to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The past 11 years of occupation have brought nothing to the people of Afghanistan but the complete destruction of infrastructure and loss of access to healthcare and education. According to the United Nations, Afghanistan has over 500,000 internally displaced refugees.

The most recent example of the death and destruction caused by NATO is in Libya. As NATO monitored the so-called "no-fly zone" over Libya, over 26,000 bombing sorties, resulting in nearly 10,000 air strikes, were carried out by NATO member countries, including the United States and Canada. This bombing campaign has left Libya, which was a country with the highest levels of education and healthcare in Africa, in shambles.



organizations called for a mass protest to take place in Chicago during what was then scheduled to be the NATO/G8 Summit. But, everyone at the meeting knew it wasn't going to be easy to get the City of Chicago to issue a permit for the demonstration and that a struggle would have to be waged for the basic right to protest.

Following the August meeting, CANG8 immediately sprung into action, launching a campaign to secure the permits necessary to organize a march on the NATO Summit. After months of letter writing, petitioning, demonstrations against the City of Chicago, press conferences and a newspaper advertisement in the Chicago Sun Times, the City of Chicago finally granted CANG8 a permit, a first victory for all people who stand for democratic and civil rights. The next victory for the campaign came on May 6 when the government of the US announced

NATO, but on building a world without war, occupation and poverty. Then on Sunday, May 20, thousands of people will be in the streets of Chicago at a mass rally demanding jobs, housing, healthcare, education, our pensions, the environment, Not War!

Canada was one of the founding member countries of NATO, and continues to contribute troops, material and financial support to NATO missions. Take, for example, the NATO mission in Libya in which Canadian war planes dropped over 700 bombs at the cost of over 25 million dollars. This makes it all the more important that people in Canada support the actions being organized against NATO in Chicago. These actions are an important part of building a stronger and more united movement against war and occupation all over the world. As NATO meets to plan their strategy for more war, people from the US, Canada, Europe and all over the world who will be gathering in Chicago must also take this opportunity to meet and plan for continued actions in solidarity with oppressed people fighting foreign intervention and occupation, from Afghanistan to Libya, to Syria and Iran, and wherever NATO may strike next.

Since attending the first meeting of CANG8, Vancouver's antiwar coalition Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) has participated in the organizing of protest events and is working to make sure that peace-loving people in Canada know to go to Chicago to protest NATO this May.

For more information about actions being organized in Chicago, visit the CANG8 website: www.cang8.org.

To find out how you can support the actions in Chicago from here in Vancouver, contact Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) at www.mawovancouver.org or info@mawovancouver.org

"To Struggle for the Cuban 5 is to Struggle for Humanity!"

"5 Days for the Cuban 5" Moves International Campaign to Free the Cuban 5 Forward

By Thomas Davies

What kind of thoughts must have crossed the mind of Rene Gonzalez as the island of Cuba became smaller and smaller in the view from his airplane window, and the city of Miami emerged almost immediately on the horizon. Rene, a Cuban political prisoner held in the United States for the past 13 years, had been granted two weeks to visit his terminally ill brother in Havana and was then required to return to the U.S. to finish three years of probation.

His story, and that of the four other Cuban men currently serving long sentences in U.S. jails, reads like something out of an incredible spy novel. Sent unarmed from Cuba to infiltrate right wing Cuban exile groups which have killed over 3500 Cubans in various terrorist attacks over the past 50 years, the "Cuban 5," Rene Gonzalez, Ramon Labanino, Fernando Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, and Gerardo Hernandez, were imprisoned after evidence they had collected detailing the plans and activities of these terrorist groups was handed over to the U.S. government. Instead of jailing the proven terrorists, the U.S. put the Cuban 5 on trial in the completely hostile environment of Miami, and sentenced them to a total of four life terms and 75 years between them on the vague and unsubstantiated charges of "conspiracy to commit murder" and "conspiracy to commit espionage."

The story could have ended there, with the Cuban 5 wasting away in separate maximum security jail cells, but today a different ending is being written by a growing movement which has made the Cuban 5 the most well known political prisoners on the planet. This increasingly active and coordinated campaign took a big step forward with the "5 Days to Free the Cuban 5" in Washington, DC from April 17th to 21st. Organized by the International Committee to Free the Cuban 5, people from all over the world descended upon the U.S. capitol for a five days of events and activities which were reinforced by simultaneous actions in more than 45 other countries. Four organizers from two Cuban solidarity organizations in Vancouver, Free the Cuban 5 Committee Vancouver, and

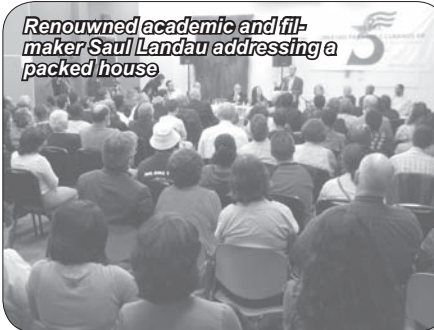
Organizers on Capitol Hill



Vancouver organizers participate in the White House rally



Renowned academic and filmmaker Saul Landau addressing a packed house



Free the Cuban 5 Committee- Vancouver organizer Alison Bodine speaks to the White House rally



Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba participated in this "5 Days" international event.

From over 45 meetings with Congress and Senate offices on Capitol Hill, to successful campus events and cultural presentations, organizers brought the case of the Cuban 5 to new and diverse audiences. The "5 Days" activities also involved a meeting between religious leaders and an educational event organized by Wayne Smith, former Chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba featuring Nova Scotian author Stephen Kimber.

A large venue was not large enough to hold all of those who came to hear a long panel of local and international guest speakers, including actor Danny Glover, United Farm Workers co-founder Dolores Huerta, as well as panelists from France, Germany, and the Smithsonian Institution in the U.S. These events were crucial in helping to break down the mainstream media blackout which has characterized the news coverage of the case. TV cameras from major news media sources covered the activities and the case of the Cuban 5, many for the first time since they were arrested almost 14 years ago.

The 5 Days to Free the Cuban 5 culminated with a large demonstration in front of the White House. Hundreds of people from diverse communities all joined together to chant, "Hey Obama you will see, the Cuban 5 will be free!" Veteran civil rights activist Dick Gregory, anti-war organizer Cindy Sheehan, as well as Free the Cuban 5 Committee – Vancouver organizer Alison Bodine were among the many speakers demanding freedom for the Cuban 5. A statement by Gerardo Hernandez read to the demonstration summarized the atmosphere, "I am often asked how, despite being sentenced to two lives in a U.S. prison, that I can stay so positive and forward looking and I answer with conviction the same thing each and every time; it is because the Cuban 5 enjoys the support of people like you and the love of our homeland."

The campaign to Free the Cuban 5 has come along way since the first committees formed in their defense over a decade ago. 11 Nobel Peace Prize winners and most importantly, millions of people on every continent of the world, have all come to demand, "Free the Cuban 5 Now!" While this movement has become strong enough to have forced the U.S. Government to reduce some of their sentences and allow Rene to return to Cuba for two weeks, it must continue to grow until all of the Cuban 5 have been unconditionally freed and return to Cuba. The "5 Days for the Cuban 5" was proof of the huge vitality and potential of the international movement to Free the Cuban 5, and we must continue forward with all of the optimism, dignity, and determination of Cuba and the Cuban 5 themselves.

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